

THE PORTRAYAL OF WOMEN
IN THE
LIBYAN SHORT STORY

A Thesis Submitted for the Degree of
Doctor of Philosophy

BY

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TO THE MEMORY OF MY FATHER to whom I owe
everything and whose unexpected death prevented him
from realising a long-cherished wish to see the
result of my work

ABSTRACT

This thesis sets out to examine the portrayal of women as an important literary aspect of the Libyan short story. An attempt has been made to identify the main features of such portrayals and to point out the degree to which major short story writers in Libya are conscious, in one way or another, of the importance of the problems confronting Libyan women and the need for their emancipation. The method adopted for this purpose is to discuss the varying levels of consciousness of the problem against a background of modern literary criticism which, although not fully developed in Libya, is nonetheless becoming increasingly important. As a corollary, it has been possible to discuss various ideological attitudes only in relation to the formal and structural issues which are often raised regarding the short story as a literary genre. Among these issues are the organic interdependence of form and content, success or failure in attempting to objectify human experience in an adequate artistic form, and the degree to which ideological considerations or commitment can be regarded as relevant to our appreciation of the Libyan

short story as an art-form. The degree of ideological commitment to the problem of female emancipation is not, in itself, a determinant of artistic success, but it may pave the way for literary creation in which a progressive role for women in Libyan society is combined with fuller consciousness of the importance of the formal elements of the Libyan short story.

* * *

NOTE ON TRANSLATION OF EXTRACTS

Extracts from the Arabic have not been translated verbatim owing to the existence of a number of terms and expressions of current literary Arabic and of Libyan dialect for which it has not been easy to find English equivalents. Thus, a certain latitude has been found to be necessary in translating certain phrases and idioms to which exception might otherwise be taken as being over-literal.

* * *

NOTE ON TRANSLITERATION

Established methods of transliteration have been adopted:

- 1 - The definite article al- is used before solar and lunar titles.
- 2 - The final t in the genitive has been retained but otherwise deleted.
- 3 - A shadda is represented by doubling the relevant letter.

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INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this thesis is to enable us to understand the problems and issues surrounding the short story genre as a literary form in Libya, particularly in regard to the portrayal of women and, in this respect, we have also given an overview of the problem of female education in Libya.

Despite my conviction that no direct relationship exists between sociology of education on the one hand, and the short story and its portrayal of women on the other, yet I believe that a general understanding of the social and cultural status of women in Libya, from the standpoint of education and prevailing beliefs about the role and position of women, will help to shed light on the depiction of the woman in the contemporary Libyan short story.

The deep-rooted traditional beliefs that prevail in Libya with regard to women may, in fact, be assigned to the educational system instigated by the Ottoman government in Libya during the latter part of the last century, a system that was largely influenced by religious doctrine.⁽¹⁾ In

1. See Khalīfa Muḥammad al-Tillīsī, "Lamḥa ʿan al-Ḥayāt al-Adabiyya fī Libya", Al-Ruwwād, March-April, 1969, pp.29 ff; Aḥmad Sidqī al-Dijānī, Libya Qubayl al-Iḥtilāl al-Itālī, 1882-1911, (Tripoli, n.d.), pp.271-72.

1895, the Turks established a limited number of primary schools in an attempt to 'Turkify' the process of teaching and instruction not, it should be said, with complete success. They appointed teachers in the 'Kuttab's', or Koranic schools, to give instruction in the Turkish language for two hours each day.⁽¹⁾ These schools existed alongside the schools established by the Turkish authorities in Tripoli, Benghazi, Derna and Khums. In addition, they founded a number of adult night and day schools known as 'maktab's' as well as a teachers training college offering a 3-year course in the Turkish language, geography, history, engineering and the religious sciences.⁽²⁾ Established too were various centres for teaching the Berbers in the desert and mountain regions of the country. Originally, their education was based purely on Berber traditions but it gradually became arabized.⁽³⁾ However, this traditional educational system was based on erroneous or summary interpretations of the Islamic view of women.

1. Francesco Coro, Libya athnā'a al-^CAhd al-^CUthmānī, trans. Khalīfa al-Tillīsī (Tripoli, 1971), pp.117-9.

2. Ibid.

3. See Aḥmad ^CAlī al-Funayyish, Al-Mujtama^C al-Lībī wa Mushkilātuh, (Tripoli, 1967), p.75.

Also in the last century there appeared the Sanūssī movement in the province of Cyrenaica, a movement that played a historic role in the Libyan independence movement. Despite this positive political role on the part of the Sanūssī authorities, being a Sūfī movement, they did not encourage the education of women.⁽¹⁾ However, their stance on the issue of women was certainly no different from that adopted by other religious movements. The Sanūssī movement had been founded by Muḥammad Ibn ʿAlī al-Sanūssī al-Khaṭṭābī al-Ḥusaynī who claimed to have been a descendant of the Prophet. He was a well-educated and devout Muslim but his Sūfī background acted as a barrier to any positive encouragement of female education, believing that education should be confined to males alone. His immediate successors held exactly the same views. His was a call for Muslim unity and a return to Islamic fundamentals, an objective that, unfortunately, was interested not at all in matters of feminine concern.

One could argue that the importance of al-Sanūssī's call lay in the fact that it advocated a true and virtuous

1. Niqūla Ziyāda, Libya fī al-ʿUsūr al-Hadītha, (Tripoli, 1966), p.64 ff; Akram Muṣṭafā al-Khuḍarī, Al-Āthār al-Ijtimāʿiyya li al-Ḥaraka al-Sanūsiyya fī Libya, (Summary, MA Thesis, Cairo University, 1966, pp.12 ff).

lifestyle based on the reconciliation of spiritual and material demands stressing that to be a devout and pious person did not entail a renunciation of secular matters to do with the Muslim community or of scientific and political life. These Sanūssi beliefs spread throughout the oases and desert areas but had little influence on the coastal towns. In those regions where they held sway, the Sanūssians founded a number of 'zāwiyas' (small mosques with teaching faculties) that played a prominent role in bettering the lives of the desert people. The Turkish authorities themselves were little interested in education at the end of the last century other than the fact that, as stated, they set up primary schools that afforded its pupils a 3-year education.⁽¹⁾ The lack of records means that no accurate information exists as to the number of female pupils who attended these schools. However, M. Nājī confirms that the number of female students attending primary school in 1902 numbered 100 with the number of males standing at 132 although it seems that the majority of these pupils were of Turkish origin.²

1. See Niqūlā Ziyāda, op.cit..

2. M. Nājī, Tā'rīkh Ṭarābulus al-Gharb, Benghazi, 1970.

During the Italian occupation that began in 1911, men and women both were exposed to a modern educational system and the influence of Western civilization. However, the educational system which the Italian authorities introduced was founded upon racial discrimination inasmuch as the Libyan people received no benefits from the new facilities being provided. Although the Italians set up new schools in certain areas, their main objective was not to widen the educational base of the Libyan people but to teach the Italian language and spread their own culture in a bid to destroy Arab nationalist tendencies and to obliterate the Libyan character. All of this had a pronounced negative effect upon the intellectual and psychological makeup of Libyan women, denied, as they were, the right to an education, contrary to the situation in certain other Arab countries such as Egypt.

According to research carried out by Aḥmad ʿAlī Funayyish, the statistics for the scholastic year 1943/44 reveal 134 girl pupils at primary school level. For 1953.54 this figure increases to 4885 and 1960/61 shows a further increase to 12,073.⁽¹⁾

1. Aḥmad ʿAlī Funayyish, op.cit., p.85; see also the statistical records of the Libyan Ministry of Planning, Statistics and Census Department, 1975, pp.90-91.

It has to be said that the elementary education granted to girls was not enough to instigate the spread of female consciousness in Libya in view of constraints imposed upon the educational system by the Italian authorities whose sole objective was for education to serve the cause of colonialism. This policy resulted in a certain number of Libyans being compelled to emigrate or travel abroad, particularly to Egypt, in order to further their education. Among the writers who emigrated and who are discussed in the present thesis are ^CAlī Muṣṭafā al-Miṣrātī, ^CAbd Allāh al-Quwayrī, Kāmil al-Maghūr and Za^Cīma al-Bārūnī, all of whom were able abroad to continue their studies in the Arabic language, literature and the religious sciences. However, although these writers were exposed to the influence of Egyptian freedom and liberty and were witness to the women's movement that began to take viable shape during the early part of this century, yet they themselves did not adopt a positive attitude towards the liberation of the Libyan woman.

In Egypt, female education had begun during the 19th century after Muḥammad ^CAlī had initiated an educational programme that was unique in the history of modern Egypt. In this new cultural environment, many Egyptian reformers and

intellectuals came to be influenced by the principles of the French Revolution, especially in view of the fact that many of Saint-Simon's followers had gone to Egypt to work in different fields.⁽¹⁾ Their importance to the cultural life of the country had a clear influence upon Egyptian public opinion particularly as regards female education and the positive part women could play in society. In this respect, Rifā^ḥa al-Taḥṭāwī launched a powerful campaign advocating the education of women⁽²⁾ but this, unfortunately, failed to make any impression upon neighbouring Libya in view of that country's different historical context, a context that had, indeed, resulted in its cultural isolation.

However, the Egyptian reformers' propagation of female education and emancipation met with stern resistance from certain ^ḥUlema and Muslim intellectuals who held opposite views on the matter of women's place in society. This

1. See M. Ṭala^ḥat ^ḥIsā, Atbā^ḥ Saint-Simon, Cairo (1957), *passim*; Albert Hourani, Arabic Thought In The Liberal Age 1798-1939, Cambridge University Press (1983), p.53.

2. See J. Heyworth-Dunne, Rifā^ḥa Badawī Rafi^ḥ al-Taḥṭāwī: The Egyptian Revivalist, BSOAS 10, 1940-42, p.27; Mona Mikhail, Images of Arab Women, (Washington, 1979), p.48.

religious debate was later crystalized in writing by some intellectuals who made an open appeal for the emancipation of women, in particular, Qāsim Amīn. The publication of his influential work, Tahrīr al-Mar'a (Emancipation of Women), in 1899 marks an important stage in the history of Arabic thought. It had a great impact not only on Egyptian society but on Arab society in general, including Libya. It gave rise to strong debates about issues that were regarded as important at the time such as the problems of the veil, divorce and polygamy.

Qāsim Amīn argues that the use of the veil is not dictated by Islamic traditions but is a social habit that was prevalent in certain other societies including European. Its development or obsolescence differs in no way from any other social habit. The reason, he says, is that

the veil represents one of the historical stages in the life of women in the world. Under 'veil', Larousse says: 'Greek women used the veil whenever they went out, hiding their faces with a part of it as is the case now among Eastern nations.' It adds, 'The Christian faith had no effect upon the veiling of women and kept it as it was without change whenever Christianity took root in a country. Women used to cover their heads when they went out in the streets and also when they said their prayers. The veil was used by women in the Middle Ages, notably in the 9th century. It used to cover the shoulders,

almost touching the ground. Its use continued until the 13th century when women began to reduce it in size until it became as it is now, a lightweight cover to protect the face from dust and cold weather. However, it did remain in use in its original form in Spain and the Latin-American countries it had colonised."⁽¹⁾

The veil is a social habit and not a necessity or an injunction imposed upon Moslem women by the Shari^Ca. Qāsim Amīn says:

Divine commandments should be succumbed to without any discussion or debate. There is no Shari^Cah text which makes the use of the veil incumbent upon women in this customary manner. Rather, it is a custom which Muslims learnt as a result of mixing with other nations. They then approved of it, accepted it, went to extremes in applying it, and then conferred upon it a religious sanction, as they did with other habits that have become deeply entrenched in the name of religion. Religion, however, has nothing to do with such habits. Therefore nothing prevents us from examining them; indeed, it is our duty to study them and to point out the attitudes of the Shari^Cah towards these habits and the people's need to change them."⁽²⁾

Qāsim Amīn refers, in this connection, to verses 30 and 31 of the Quranic Sūra^T 'Al-Nūr' (Light) which he interprets as

1. Qāsim Amīn, Tahrīr al-Mar'a, Cairo (n.d.), p.79.

2. Ibid, p.81.

supporting his argument. His attitude towards the role of women in society is based upon the belief that reactionary interpretations of the point at issue are neither valid nor objectively sanctioned from the Islamic point of view. He sincerely believes that Moslem women have been granted rights (denied to Western women) by Islam since its inception fourteen centuries ago. Islam has conferred upon women the right to dispose of their property and manage their financial affairs as they think fit. It has also urged Moslems to educate their women because knowledge or learning should not be limited to men. Qāsim Amīn believes that, according to Islam, women can have any vocation and do any job in society. Current attitudes in Moslem society towards women are based upon slavery. Qāsim Amīn's conception of slavery implies that the slave is not a human being to be bought and sold but is a person deprived of the right or ability to think for himself or herself, or to exercise his or her will.

There is no doubt that these progressive interpretations of the Islamic doctrine as to the necessity or desirability of the education of women were made attractive to many Moslems as a result of the keen interest shown by Muḥammad

ʿAbdu in this problem, as indeed in other problems of the Moslem family, an interest that stems from the traditional belief that the family is the basic nucleus of Moslem society. This interest in reforming the family cannot be disassociated from Muḥammad ʿAbdu's idealistic conception of the values of feudal and agricultural society. He felt that these values were threatened by family feuds about inheritance and money matters. However, Muḥammad ʿAbdu was probably not adequately aware that the real threat to such values was social change in the wide, historical sense.

What is certain is that Muḥammad ʿAbdu was seriously interested in spreading education in Islamic society. In this connection, mention should be made of the fact that he played an important role in producing Qāsim Amīn's Tahrīr al-Mar'a. Muḥammad ʿAbdu called upon the Egyptian people to educate women and wanted the enlightened elite of educated Egyptian women to form a feminist society to set up schools for female education.

Among the important aspects of reform which Qāsim Amīn called for was his attempt to organize the divorce regulations by issuing divorce laws for the Islamic courts in

Egypt. The laws he advocated are as follows:

Article 1

Any husband who wishes to divorce his wife shall report to the Islamic judge or the Ma'zūn resident within his area of jurisdiction and inform him of the dispute or difference arising between him and his wife.

Article 2

The judge or Ma'zūn should direct the husband's attention to what is mentioned in the Quran and the Sunna, namely that the Almighty regards divorce as a hateful act. The judge or Ma'zūn should advise the husband and point out to him the consequences of what he is doing and should advise him to consider the matter carefully for one week.

Article 3

If the husband insists, after one week, upon his intent to divorce his wife, the judge or Ma'zūn should send an arbiter from among the relatives of the husband and another from among the relatives of the wife or, failing this, two arbiters from other families, in order to attempt a reconciliation.

Article 4

If the two arbiters do not succeed in reconciling husband and wife, they shall submit a report to the judge or Ma'zūn. Thereupon, the judge or Ma'zūn shall permit the husband to divorce his wife.

Article 5

Divorce shall not be valid unless it takes place

before the judge or Ma'zūn and in the presence of two witnesses. It can be proved only by an official document.⁽¹⁾

These laws of divorce spring from Muḥammad ḤAbdu's belief that unless Moslem society attempts to carry out serious reform on the matter of divorce, a great deal of suffering would be inflicted upon all members of society. An enlightened interpretation of Islamic laws would, in this respect, help Moslems to change society. Such an interpretation would be based upon an eclectic approach to various Islamic creeds. This revolutionary method has not yet been applied with any consistency - nearly a century after the publication of these proposals for reform.

In the field of polygamy, Muḥammad ḤAbdu also adopted enlightened and reformist views which have not yet been fully put into effect in Arab society at large. Muḥammad ḤAbdu wanted to limit polygamy to cases in which the wife cannot beget any children. This attitude is linked with his belief that men's sexual appetites should be reasonably controlled.⁽²⁾ In order to justify it from the Islamic point

1. Muḥammad ḤAbdu, Al-AḤmāl al-Kāmila, Beirut (1972), II, pp.125-27.

2. Ibid, p.88.

of view, Muḥammad ḤAbdu points out that the Quranic stipulation of justice to four wives makes it difficult for polygamy to spread in Moslem society. He even goes a step further, making it clear that it is the duty of a Moslem to limit himself to one wife as long as there is doubt as to the possibility of achieving justice as required:

The Muḥammedan law has made it legal for a man to marry four women if he knows that he is capable of being just to all of them. Otherwise, he may only have one wife. God says in the Quran: 'But if ye fear that ye shall not be able to deal justly with them, then only one.' (The Women, 3) If the man cannot give each one of them her right, this will disrupt the family, making it lead a miserable life.⁽¹⁾

Muḥammad ḤAbdu realized that the system of polygamy had not been an exclusively Oriental phenomenon. It is not a system which divides East from West; it does not exist, for example, in Mongolia or Tibet. On the other hand, it was practised, in one form or another, by some races in the West, especially the Germanic and Gallic peoples. It was allowed in some cases by the Popes of Rome after Christianity had spread throughout Europe. In other words, Muḥammad ḤAbdu

1. Ibid, p.78.

believed that polygamy owed its existence to special circumstances. Therefore, it is a system which is bound to disappear when the special circumstances disappear. Polygamy arose and spread in ancient military societies when the number of women exceeded that of men. Arabia, before and after Islam, was certainly one of those societies in which polygamy spread as a result of frequent wars.

The position adopted by Muḥammad ḤAbdu was also based upon the assumption that Islam, contrary to the allegations of some European writers, did not accept the practices and traditions of pre-Islamic Arabia with regard to polygamy. He believed that Islam, far from encouraging polygamy, took a reformist attitude towards this problem with a view to gradually abolishing it. In pre-Islamic Arabia, polygamy was allowed, apparently without any limits or restrictions.

The Quran was, in fact, revolutionary in adopting this attitude towards polygamy because the underlying motive was to abolish it. Absolute justice in the husband's attitude towards his wives is an absolute condition upon which the Quran insists. The fact that this condition is difficult to fulfill implies, according to Muḥammad ḤAbdu, that the ultimate aim is to abolish polygamy in Islamic society. His

interpretation of the Quranic text on this important problem is clear and unequivocal. Since absolute justice can only be achieved in rare cases, then the Islamic ideal is to proscribe, or reduce the instance of, polygamy, allowing it only in exceptional cases.

The above interpretations, which are evidently relevant to the education of women and the feminist movement in general, are still controversial and are being debated in many Arab and Islamic countries. In Libya, however, the most important document in this controversy is the well-known book Naḥwa Ghadin Mushriq (Towards a Better Future) by Muḥammad Farīd Siyāla. In his attempt to determine the reasons for the backward condition of Libyan women and their lack of participation in society, Siyāla attributes this situation to Ottoman and Turkish imperialism. Views of this kind were prevalent in the fifties. Mention is made of the fact that Italian imperialism tried to prevent Libyan youth, both men and women, from joining regular schools in Libya and, in addition, to replace Arabic with Italian in many schools.⁽¹⁾

The views expressed by Siyāla are fairly representative of

1. Muḥammad Farīd Siyāla, Naḥwa Ghadin Mushriq, Tripoli (1958), pp. 3 - 8

a considerable section of Libyan intellectuals. In their polemics on the need for women's emancipation in Libya there are often generalizations which are accepted, not necessarily for their sociological and historical truth, but for their persuasive effect, as in much poetry or fiction. Emphatic statements are often made for the sake of the emotional effects they are intended to evoke. Siyāla remarks on the need for emancipation as follows:-

It would be preposterous and absurd not to recognize the need for women's participation in social life. Those nations, societies and peoples that we see today enjoying their freedom and sovereignty had not attained such a great degree of perfection, progress and prosperity before they recognized the woman as a human being with rights and duties, capable of doing productive work and of participation in society. She is prevented from participating only because she is deprived of the opportunity to do so."⁽¹⁾

Evidence is given to show that the emancipation of women is perfectly compatible with the teachings of Islam. Reference is made⁽²⁾ to the positive role carried out by Moslem women in early Islam. This links up with the argument that the non-emancipation of women is a fundamental factor

1. Ibid, p.13.

2. Ibid, p.19.

responsible for the backwardness of Libyan society. It is also important to realize that Siyāla compares present-day backwardness of women to the undeveloped state of women in the pre-Islamic era. During that period, according to Siyāla, woman was not looked upon as a full member of society despite the fact that she was often the object of romantic love in the poetry of the time. But the theme of romantic love does not mean that she enjoyed an elevated status in the social scheme of pre-Islamic times. Love, sexual gratification, or acute suffering caused by the absence of the beloved could not mean that woman was equal to man.⁽¹⁾ On the contrary, the Quran refers to the habit of killing young girls for fear of poverty, a practice it condemns in very sharp terms. Such habits contrast with the equality of the sexes⁽²⁾ and the definition of their respective duties and responsibilities as laid down in the Quran. This explicit emphasis in the Quran on the new organization of society was an important aspect of people's

1. Ibid, p.26.

2. Ibid, p.26.

outlook on reality but it was obstructed by Ottoman hegemony with its perversion of true Islamic teachings.

That Islam gave women individual freedom which had previously been denied to them can be confirmed by the contribution of famous Moslem women in poetry and prose. The great age of early Islam, in which women were liberated, contrasts sharply with the current situation in Libya and the other Arab countries:

Woman, with us, is looked upon as a creature not created for life or happiness, as though she had no right to life and happiness in this separatist society which lives like a sick man with one lung. She is a liability imposed on everybody, whether in the home of her father or in what is called the home of marriage. In the first, she is a prisoner of the home, a servant of the house devoted to waiting upon her parents and brothers. She does not leave this prison until she becomes betrothed or when she leaves it for the grave."⁽¹⁾

The problem of pre-arranged marriage is another aspect of this attitude towards Libyan women. Siyāla makes favourable references to Qāsim Amīn⁽²⁾ and his influence on the movement of liberation of the Egyptian woman. His influence

1. Ibid, p.32.

2. Ibid, p.47.

in Libya was presumably limited to its role in shaping, indirectly, the attitudes of some Libyan intellectuals such as Siyāla. At the same time, this call for women's emancipation does not amount to a total Westernization of Libyan society. Since the Islamic tradition is itself favourable to women's emancipation, Siyāla rightly says that Libyan society must preserve the traditional values cherished by Islam.

A number of feminist movement societies were established during the fifties; the Tripoli feminist society was founded in 1958.⁽¹⁾ These societies, according to Siyāla, aim at resisting what he calls the fatalist, defeatist and reactionary elements in Libyan society.

On the other hand, what he calls "the disease of blind imitation" of the West would not be acceptable or compatible with the Libyan Islamic tradition. Indeed, the attempt to westernize Libya totally would serve the interests of imperialism.⁽²⁾

A solution proposed by Siyāla is to educate Libyan women by establishing schools all over the country. The system of

1. Ibid, p.38

2. Ibid, p.42

education for both boys and girls should be changed in the light of the new requirements for educating Libyan women. Siyāla also refers to the social duty of the teacher in inspiring the minds of Libyan youth, both men and women, with ideas of "Islamic socialism".⁽¹⁾ The "noble socialist cause"⁽²⁾ for the new generation in Libya can only be served and strengthened by the new socio-political consciousness of teachers in Libya. This is one way of reconciling the claims of traditionalism and enlightenment in modern life. Bad traditions should be discarded and good traditions which conform to the requirements of the modern age should be preserved. In this way, the "good citizen", whether man or woman, can be brought up for a better society in Libya.

The relevance to Libyan literature of these speculations and interpretations of Islamic attitudes towards the education and rights of women in Islamic society will be made clear as we examine individual authors in the present work. They are important speculations which throw

1. Ibid, p.66.

2. Ibid, p.66.

considerable light upon the intellectual climate in which the Libyan short story emerged and developed. Yet, in discussing the way women are portrayed in the Libyan short story, it is also important to realize that we cannot look upon the short story as a mere socio-historical document. Despite its artistic weaknesses, some of which are discussed in the following chapters, there are signs that it has relatively developed and assumed more literary importance than it had during the early stages of its emergence in the 1920s. There is, in addition, an important sense in which the history of the modern short story in Libya cannot be dissociated from the history of the Libyan press.

During the initial stages of their emergence, the various official Libyan newspapers published articles and poetry written according to the classical Arabic tradition.⁽¹⁾ Such was the case of the material published in al-Munaqqib, which started publication in 1863, was concerned. From the literary point of view, it cannot be regarded as an

1. See Fawzi al-Bishtī, "Al-Maḍmūn al-Thawrī fī al-Qiṣṣa al-Libiyya al-Qaṣīra", Al-Fuṣūl al-Arbaʿa, (1979); Bashīr al-Hāshimī, "Lamḥa ʿan al-Qiṣṣa al-Qaṣīra fī Libya", Al-Ruwwād, (January, 1979), pp.19 ff.

important literary source. Tarābulus al-Gharb commenced publication in 1866 in both Arabic and Turkish. Although it was meant to be primarily a political newspaper, it contained literary essays in Arabic. In addition to essay-writing, which was then a main art-form, literary news, information and material were reported from the Egyptian press.⁽¹⁾ This newspaper ceased publication in 1911 when the Italian occupation took over from the Turks. There were also other newspapers such as Salmāna, which started publication in 1896, that were controlled by the Turkish authorities.⁽²⁾

The situation was different with regard to the privately-owned press, which played a more vital role in the literary renaissance of Libya. Foremost among these important newspapers was Al-Taraqqi which was established in 1897 and was the first private newspaper.⁽³⁾ It was issued and owned

1. M. Ṣalāḥ al-Dīn Bin Mūsā, Al-Ṣaḥfa al-Adabiyya fī Libya 1869-1969, unpublished MA Thesis, Al-Fatih University, Libya (1982), pp.39 ff.

2. Ibid, p.40

3. Ibid, pp.40-41.

by Sheikh Maḥmūd al-Buṣayrī. It is not without significance that this newspaper began to publish Libyan poetry, written in the classical tradition, and other literary material, to which a special section was devoted. This literary and cultural section was called Mabāḥith Adabiyya (Literary Researches). The premises of this newspaper, were, in fact, a literary salon visited by writers, poets and men of letters who were interested in the state of Libyan culture and literary problems. It is generally thought that Al-Taraqqī has contributed a great deal to cultural journalism in Libya.⁽¹⁾ This has rightly been attributed to the patriotism of its staff and the key influence of the literary salon as an important intellectual factor in Libya's cultural development. However, it ceased publication in 1919 but resumed later in the same year.

The short story as a literary genre did not exist during that period, but there is no doubt that this newspaper, together with others, paved the way for its emergence insofar as they reported literary news from the other Arab countries, especially from Egypt. What is strictly relevant

1. Ibid.

to the genesis of the Libyan short story is the fact that this journalistic and cultural renaissance in Libya was extremely important in liberating the Arabic language from its traditional forms and classical structures and making it a medium for conveying or transmitting modern ideas and attitudes. It is reasonable to suppose that writers found it easy to utilise the resources of Arabic as a vehicle for literary and artistic expression. This modern sensibility developed gradually, especially during the relative period of prosperity and freedom which the Libyan press enjoyed as a result of the development of the Young Turks Movement towards the end of the last century.

A number of Turks lived at the time in exile, both in Europe and Egypt, and seized the opportunity to set up reformist societies. Newspapers and journals were published which attacked the Ottoman government.⁽¹⁾ Kamal Atatürk himself fought the Italians in Libya in 1911, in the Derna area. The Movement affected the cultural climate in Libya and helped to create a new atmosphere and new circumstances

1. Khalīfa Muḥammad al-Tillīsī, "Lamḥa ʿan al-Ḥayāt al-Adabiyya fī Libya, Al-Ruwwād, (March-April, 1969), pp.29-39.

favourable to the liberation of Libya from Ottoman dominance.⁽¹⁾ This freedom, however, was short-lived for the Libyan people because of the blow directed against Libya by the forces of Italian imperialism in 1911. It is generally agreed that the period between 1908 and 1911 was the golden period for early Libyan cultural journalism. During those years strong support was given to literary writing. Many new newspapers appeared and Libyan writers and poets were remarkably active. It is, in fact, this period which is rightly regarded as the period of transition from traditional rhetorical styles to modern literary form. It corresponds to the transition from Turkish rule to the struggle against foreign domination. Significantly, the Turkish government in 1908 made many concessions to the revolutionary movement led by the Young Turks. In the same year, elections were held under the 1870 Constitution and the new parliament met, with Turkish and Arab members. As a result of the Italian occupation of the country, this literary renaissance was seriously hampered.

There is no doubt that the newspapers mentioned above

2. See Muḥammad ʿAlī Qadrī, Mustafā Kamāl Atatürk, (1983), Al-Maṭbaʿa al-Waṭaniyya, p.9.

encouraged writers in Libya to pursue their literary activity and to contribute to the intellectual life of the country. Literary articles were the most important genre, followed by poetry and the short story in the 1920s. These short stories, however, were more in the nature of essays depicting social or moral situations and were, presumably, influenced by the tradition established by Muṣṭafā Luṭfī al-Manfalūṭī.⁽¹⁾ The literary essay, as an art-form, was a vehicle for expressing the writer's feelings, attitudes and opinions about problems of public interest. Unfortunately, this literary movement was adversely affected by the Italian invasion, although a number of papers began to encourage literary writing around the year 1919, especially Al-Raqīb, Al-Liwā' and Libya al-Muṣawwara. This encouragement was fruitful and useful in contributing to the literary revival but, unfortunately, the majority of these stories were not signed. Gradually, literary consciousness began to spread and names of writers began to appear regularly.

Among the important names is Aḥmad Rāsim Qadrī who published stories under the pseudonym Qāsim Fikrī, in

1. See A.I. al-Faqīh, Bidāyat al-Qiṣṣa al-Lībiyya, Al-Munsha'a al-^Camma, Tripoli, (1985), pp.19 ff.

Libya al-Musawwara. In the January 1936 issue of that newspaper, he published, for example, a short story entitled Ṣaḥā'if al-Shabāb (Pages of Youth), a romantic story about love in which the lover decides to kill his beloved, apparently because he suspects her of infidelity, but refrains from doing so.⁽¹⁾ The technical defects of the story are typical of the period, springing from the use of the rhetoric of classical style, elements of digression from the main theme and lack of concern with the organic form of the story. Equally typical is the romantic indulgence in flights of imagination in the sense that there is not sufficient awareness of literary realism. The result is that Qadrī's attempt at artistic creation is not entirely convincing; he gives the impression that he has not benefited greatly from his knowledge of Italian language and literature.

Another important writer who, together with Aḥmad Rāsim Qadrī, published his early attempts in Libya al-Muṣawwara, was Wahbī al-Būrī whose knowledge of Italian language and literature enabled him to translate Italian short stories

1. See Libya al-Muṣawwara, (January, 1936).

into Arabic. Like Aḥmad Rāsim Qadrī and others, al-Būrī used either pseudonyms or his initials, primarily because he dealt with romantic or emotional themes in a conservative environment. It seems, however, that the short story, unlike poetry, was not properly appreciated in literary circles as a literary genre with its own tradition. It is worth noting that the literary attempts made by al-Būrī in this field are distinguished from the writings of other authors of that period. This was due to his Italian education and to his experience in translating from Italian literature. He serialised his Arabic translation of Dante's Divine Comedy in Libya al-Muṣawwara.

His early attempts date from 1936, at which time he published his first short story, Laylat al-Zafāf (Wedding Night),⁽¹⁾ in Libya al-Muṣawwara. This is the story of a young man from the city who has enjoyed his childhood in the company of a little girl. As she grows up, he is unable to see her any longer so decides to marry her. For this reason, he decides to work and earn money so that he might propose to her. He works as a taxi driver. However, one

1. Libya al-Muṣawwara (September 1936).

day he is hired to take a bride to the house of her bridegroom. On the way, he discovers that she is the girl with whom he is in love. He decides to kill himself, together with the bride and the other guests, by deliberately staging an accident.

This writer, like his contemporaries, is not fully aware of the structural problems of the short story as an art-form. The same preoccupation with melodrama and emotional problems is evident in Zawjat al-Ab (The Stepmother).⁽¹⁾ The social content of this story is important. After the death of his wife, the father marries again. The son and daughter, who are badly treated by their stepmother, escape from home never to return.

An interesting aspect of al-Būrī's technique is that the experiences embodied in his short stories are not necessarily personal experiences or even personal feelings or ideas which had exercised his attention prior to artistic writing. They are experiences which he had heard about from friends or acquaintances. Some critics even mention that al-Būrī, in many cases, did not bother to transmute these

1. Libya al-Muṣawwara (November 1936).

experiences into real art. Indeed, the experiences or topics embodied in his writings are based upon stories or incidents narrated by elderly people or friends at meetings or soirees held in the houses of friends or the premises of Libya al-Muṣawwara. The newspaper itself was edited by ʿOmar al-Miḥayshī. Historians and critics look upon his newspaper as an important literary channel which played a major role in Libyan literary life. It helped many talented writers to take part in the literary and intellectual movement in Libya. Wahbī al-Būrī used to take part in these literary discussions and listen to stories or tales narrated by those who attended the meetings. In addition, he was influenced by the writings and stories of leading Egyptian writers such as Taymūr, al-Māzinī and Nāguib Maḥfūz. He was also fond of reading the important Egyptian magazine Al-Risāla, and was interested in Italian literature, though Egyptian influences upon his work seem to have been stronger due to the similarity of the Egyptian and Libyan cultural environments. Al-Būrī ceased writing short stories in the late 'thirties when he went to Italy to study literature and to obtain a doctorate in Italian literature from the University of

Naples.

Al-Mir'ah, which was issued in 1946 by Fu'ād al-Ka^Cbazī, published literary and humorous material as well as current affairs. It devoted considerable space to the Libyan short story, especially stories dealing with social problems.

In 1946, this newspaper carried a short story called Zawāj Hadīth (Modern Marriage) written by Yūsuf Ḥasan al-^CAsalī which was in the form of a dialogue between the hero and one of his friends. This story brings out the importance and function of dialogue in the short story as an art-form, set against the background of social problems at the time such as the expensive dowry and marrying European girls.

Another short story, written by ^CAbdullah Kamāl, also dealing with emotional problems, is entitled Al-Wa^Cd (The Promise) and exemplifies typical artistic defects noticeable in the short story in the 'thirties and 'forties. The main weaknesses, as might be expected, are verbosity, narration, digression and lack of organic unity. The sentimental tone of many of these early attempts, the naive approach to the problems which are raised, in addition to their structural

weakness, are the general characteristics of this period. However, the publication of these stories in the Libyan newspapers at this time had an important literary consequence. In the period roughly before World War I, the gap between literary-classical Arabic and spoken Arabic was very wide. This gap began to close gradually insofar as the style of the Libyan short story was concerned. One of the most important reasons for this is that the writers of these short stories and articles wanted to make their writings more accessible to the reading public. As from 1919, journalistic writing, including the short stories published by Libyan newspapers, showed signs of healthy and progressive development, getting rid of the saj^c and archaic words and expressions. A new style, more expressive of genuine feelings and ideas, began to appear, thus reducing the gap between colloquial and classical Arabic and activating the literary movement in Libya.

A particularly significant publication is Ṣawt al-Murabbi which, in July 1955, was the first to devote a special issue to the Libyan short story. In order to convey a general picture of the literary trends dominant in that period, one

may refer to some of the short stories and controversies aroused in connection with them which were published elsewhere, especially in Tarābulus al-Gharb. This important issue of Ṣawt al-Murabbi published, in fact, seven stories in addition to a seminal critical article by Kāmil al-Maghūr entitled Qisṣatunā bint Harām (Our Short Story Is An Illegitimate Creation) which contained a severe critique, from the artistic point of view, of the Libyan short story at that stage. This critique gave rise to many debates about the nature of the short story and its function in Libyan society. In this connection, the view expressed by Khalīfa al-Tillīsī, the famous writer and literary historian, in Tarābulus al-Gharb on July 10th, 1955, is particularly significant. It comments on subjectivity in literature and calls upon writers to realise that the complexity of the real world cannot be, as it were, summed up by any one-sided attitude or philosophy. Al-Tillīsī writes in an article entitled Adabunā wa Hayātunā that it is incontrovertible that the main factor responsible for the prevalence of subjective literature, particularly in Libya, is a society in

which segregation between men and women has been

dominant. This segregation has prevented the writer from observing life and viewing it from a wide perspective. This explains why their attitudes are limited, why they are introspective and preoccupied with dreams and illusions. Perhaps it has occupied the notice of many of our critics that life is too great, too comprehensive, to be limited to a certain creed or prejudice. Life, on the contrary, can include romanticism, realism, commitment, or any other attitude.⁽¹⁾

This wider perspective upon the short story is also connected with what al-Tillīsī said about the freedom of the writer. This freedom is an absolute condition for genuine artistic creation. The essential consideration is that the writer should express in his work ideas, beliefs and convictions to which he actually subscribes and not something imposed upon him by society or any other authority external to him. This is how al-Tillīsī conceives of the relationship between the short story and reality.

The same issue of Tarābulus al-Gharb carried contributions by other writers which revealed a growing awareness of the nature of the short story as an art-form. Kāmil al-Maḡhūr's contribution in this respect should be referred to because he points to a major technical weakness

1. Al-Tillīsī, "Adabunā wa Ḥayātunā", Tarābulus al-Gharb (July 10, 1955).

from which a good number of short stories at that time suffered. Stories which are full of personal comments, interfering with the development of the action, are, in his opinion, more akin to essays or tracts than to real works of art. This defence of the integrity of the artistic experience, as embodied in literary form, is historically important. The reason is that some writers, such as Abū Harrūs, thought that such assumptions about literary form would be likely to discourage young writers. These controversies show that the Libyan writers began to develop their consciousness and their interest in the problems of literary criticism in connection with the short story. Equally, there was a great interest in establishing a close and integral relationship between the short story and social reality in Libya.

The same issue of Ṣawt al-Murabbī which was devoted to literary criticism carried short stories contributed by Khalīfa al-Tillīsī, Muḥammad Abū Ḥamid al-Gūdy, ʿAbd al-Salām Abū Gharārī, Farīd Siyāla

and others. This was in addition to the critical study referred to above. These names are all minor writers. Unfortunately, Ṣawt al-Murabbī did not publish short stories by major writers such as al-Miṣrātī and Yūsuf al-Dilansī, for example. Thus, the inevitable conclusion is that this issue gave only a partial picture of the literary scene in Libya at that time. It should be noted that during the whole of this period up to 1964 there was no literary magazine in Libya. It was in that year that Al-Ruwwād was published. This was the first literary magazine in Libya and played an important role in Libyan cultural life from 1964 to 1970.

Its appearance was a major turning point in the literary life of Libya. Prior to its appearance, Libyan writers had to publish their short stories in publications which were not strictly literary or which were not of a high literary standard. This important magazine encouraged new writers to express their real attitudes so that literary consciousness might be developed and deepened. It published during that

period not only short stories, but also critical articles, literary debates and plays.

It is noteworthy that from 1965, the year in which the Libyan short story contest was held at a national level, Libyan writers began to publish their short stories in collections printed both inside and outside Libya. As a corollary, the importance of Al-Ruwād lies primarily in developing and disseminating literary, cultural and artistic consciousness, thus making its readership gradually aware of the nature and function of literature.

The short story writers whose work is discussed in the present work have been chosen because they can be rightly regarded as the major writers in Libya at the present time. There are, of course, other short story writers, but not of the same importance. Since the present work sets out to discuss the portrayal of women in the Libyan short story, it has been thought appropriate to concentrate upon literary figures more or less of the same generation, sharing the same social problems, moral attitudes and contri-

buting to many interesting problems of literary theory.

There are, naturally, individual differences which distinguish these writers from one another as regards both their attitudes towards women and their literary techniques as a whole. I have attempted to bring out the individuality of the vision of reality conveyed of each of the writers here discussed, in the light of the literary ideals or assumptions as to the importance of formal problems which each writer may be said to have accepted. It is because their work gives rise to fruitful discussions of literary problems and of their attitudes towards women, as reflected in their work, that they have been selected and grouped together. In stating that their attitudes towards women are basic to the present work, I do not mean to attach a primarily social value to the short story. It is because, as T.S. Eliot says, artists share the problems of their age but not the solutions to these problems,⁽¹⁾ that we cannot conceive the short story

1. T.S. Eliot, On Poetry and Poets, London (1969), p.218.

writer as being akin to an 'imaginative' sociologist. That there has been a growing consciousness among Libyan artists of the need to educate women does not mean that literary merit lies in the degree to which the writer is conscious of the importance of affording Libyan women the chance to contribute to the development of society. Attitudes evoking this consciousness are unquestionably reflected, in varying degrees, in the Libyan short story. As Richards says:

That a work of art reflects, summarises and is penetrated by its age and period is not a ground for assigning it a low value, and yet this saturation more than anything else limits the duration of its appeal. Only so far as a work avoids the catchword type in its method, and relies upon elements likely to remain stable, formal elements for example, can it escape the touch of time.⁽¹⁾

The main point we should consider, following Richards, is that the deliberate attempt to reflect the problems or the sense of his age, in the form of tendentious statements, is bound to detract from the value of

1. I.A. Richards, Principles of Literary Criticism, London (1966), p.222.

the writer's work. I have been guided by Richards's warning that any such attempt usually involves a reductive approach which may be "fatal to the wholeness, the integrity of the experience".⁽¹⁾ However, this recommendation made by Richards is not, in fact, a plea for the mechanical application of formal criteria which often sacrifice the content of the work of art. From the point of view of the critic, Richards' procedure and recommendations as to the integrity of the experience conveyed by the work of art can, in fact, be combined with reasonable assumptions as to the relationship between literature and reality. The relationship in question, far from being mechanical, is dialectically complex.⁽²⁾ This is another way of saying that the artist's moral and social concerns can neither be discounted nor separated from the formal elements to which Richards refers and

1. Ibid, p.272.

2. See G. Lukacs, The Meaning of Contemporary Realism, trans. John and Necke Mander, London (1969), pp.116-117; Essays on Thomas Mann, trans. Stanley Mitchell, London (1964), p.9.

upon which the work is based.⁽¹⁾

This analytical approach has been pragmatically necessitated by the fact that the present work deals with a number of Libyan writers each portraying women in his own way, presenting an individual vision of life at large or an individual solution to the problems involved in connection with the education and liberation of women. Despite the fact that biographical criticism is very much out of favour at present, I am perfectly convinced that the lack of any biography of any Libyan writer - indeed, the unavailability, in most cases, of necessary biographical data revealing possible influences, background and suchlike - is a serious obstacle to scholarly research. Eliot's remarks as to the need to separate the man who suffers from the mind that creates⁽²⁾ hardly apply to the Libyan short story. Any scholarly attempt to determine the impersonality of creative writing in Libya is likely to be hampered rather than helped by the unavailability of biographical details which may illuminate

1. Richards, Principles, pp.72 ff.

2. T.S. Eliot, Selected Essays, London (1969), p.18.

the 'individuality' of each writer, which may show why certain writers adopt different or new techniques or why they succeed or fail in adding themselves to the mainstream of Libyan culture.

It is owing, as H.E. Bates rightly remarks, to the infinite flexibility and protean nature of the short story, that any definition of it is bound to be lacking in any satisfactory finality.⁽¹⁾ Nonetheless, it is possible to compare and discuss the achievement of Libyan short story writers, despite the variable nature of the genre from the artistic point of view. It is reasonable to suppose that any scholar dealing with the short story often proceeds from intellectual, ideological or philosophical assumptions which are bound to shape his critical practice. Concepts based upon, or derived from, Aristotle's theory of the cathartic effect of literature,⁽²⁾ from Coleridge's distinction between organic and mechanical

1. H.E. Bates, The Modern Short Story, London (1945), pp.16-18.

2. S.H. Butcher, Aristotle's Theory of Poetry and Fine Art, London, (1951), p.242.

structure,⁽¹⁾ as well as from the methods of I.A. Richards and T.S. Eliot,⁽²⁾ have influenced the present writer. The term 'cathartic' should be understood, in this context, in the wide sense given to it by Richards as being equivalent to "the correction and refinement"⁽³⁾ of the emotions and attitudes evoked by the literary work of art. Similarly, Aristotle's conception of the beginning, the middle and the end of the work of art⁽⁴⁾ can be applied to the short story in a flexible sense covering evidently any action, situation or mental activity, - a sense which does not conflict with the stream-of-consciousness technique. Nor does it conflict with the conception of literature as a superstructural activity in the Marxist sense. Lukacs, it is significant to note, also interprets Aristotle's conception of mimesis in such a way that

1. Coleridge, Biographia Literaria, London (1967), II, p.65.

2. See J.C. Ransom, The New Criticism, Norfolk, Conn. (1941), pp.51 ff.

3. Richards, Principles, p.113.

4. Butcher, op.cit., p.31.

the 'relative autonomy' of literature is preserved.

* * *

CHAPTER I

^CABDULLAH AL-QUWAYRĪ

(A) The Impact of Biographical Determinants

Al-Quwayrī's portrayal of Libyan women in his short stories cannot be disassociated from his life. His lack of interest in the feminist movement or the liberation of women in Libya is somewhat surprising in view of his progressive political views and his advocacy of socialism in Libya. This contradiction is due to the fact that the major literary influences that helped to shape his outlook during his life in Egypt were thinkers and writers who were not, on the whole, interested in the issue of women.

Al-Quwayrī was born in Egypt, 1930, in Samallūt, Minyā, into a petit-bourgeois family of Libyan tradesfolk who had emigrated to Egypt for political reasons after the 1911 Italian occupation of their homeland.⁽¹⁾ The death of his father when he was barely 13 years old, as well as the local

1. Unpublished interviews with al-Quwayrī conducted by Ziyād ^CAlī, taped and sent privately to the writer; henceforth referred to as Unpublished interviews.

social conditions in the village, must have left a deep impression upon him and reinforced his sense of alienation as a Libyan living in Egypt.

After his early education in the village school, al-Quwayrī went on to obtain his B.A. from Cairo University in 1955.⁽¹⁾ Al-Quwayrī read Geography but he was already demonstrating a creative streak and had his first short story published in the Cairo newspaper, al-Masā' in 1956.⁽²⁾ In 1957 he left Egypt for Libya in order to play his part in that country's literary renaissance.⁽³⁾

Al-Quwayrī published six collections of short stories, the first four each containing fifteen stories. **Ḥayātuhum** (Their Life), which comprises his earliest stories and ones which are more expressive of the Egyptian than the Libyan way of life, was published in 1960. Dialogue in all his early work is written in colloquial Arabic; the choice of themes is also representative of the Egyptian environment and gives a clear picture of Upper Egyptian customs. The second collection entitled **Al-ʿId fī al-Ard** (The Feast on

1. Ibid.

2. Ibid.

3. Ibid.

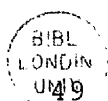
Earth) was published in 1963. These stories are typically Libyan as regards subject-matter; the use of Libyan colloquial is a highly distinctive feature and reveals, as we shall have occasion to note, a remarkable linguistic skill rarely shown by any other Libyan writer. This is also true of all the stories written after 1962. Among the salient features of the 1962 collection is the acute sense of disenchantment felt by al-Quwayrī after his return to his country from Egypt.⁽¹⁾

The third collection is entitled *Qitḥa min al-Khubz* (A Piece of Bread) and was published in 1965. The same theme of human suffering is treated, in addition to new dimensions of alienation and other experiences in Beirut. The fourth collection, entitled *Al-Furṣa wa al-Qannāṣ* (The Opportunity and the Hunter) was published in 1965. It reflects the same preoccupation with self-alienation. New elements and dimensions of experiences, such as the social change accompanying the discovery of oil, are reflected in the fifth collection. It is entitled *Al-Zayt wa al-Tamr* (Oil and Dates) and was published in 1970. The sixth collection, *Khayṭ Lam Yansijhu al-ʿAnkabūt* (A Web Not Woven by the Spider), appeared in 1975.

1. See al-Quwayrī, *Al-Waqadāt*, Tripoli (1984), pp.164 ff.

The first four collections were published in one volume, published in 1975 under the title **Sittūn Qiṣṣa Qaṣīra** (Sixty Short Stories). In addition to the short stories, al-Quwayrī published important works which give a clear picture about his theories and reflections upon the nature of the short story and literary aesthetics in general. Among these works is the now famous **Ṭāhūnat al-Shay' al-Mu^ctād** (Run of the Mill) which was published in 1971. Among other things, it deals with the function of literature and the arts in society, the nature of artistic creation, and the problem of committed literature. These preoccupations are also discussed in **Indamā Taḍijju al-A^cmāq** (When the Depths of the Soul Cry), which appeared in 1972, as well as in **Ashyā' Basīṭa** (Simple Things), which appeared in the same year.

Al-Quwayrī published his memoirs (some of which were written in the early 1970s) in 1984. Before that date, they were privately circulated in typescript. The printed version corresponds exactly to the original typed text, but it does not follow a logical or even thematic arrangement: al-Quwayrī's mind moves freely and in sudden transitions from one episode to another in an informal style. This does not, in the least, detract from its value as the most



important source about al-Quwayrī's life. It is more important than Ḥurūf al-Ramād (Letters of Ashes), published in the same year and containing impressions of a visit to London as well as other miscellaneous articles. In 1985, al-Quwayrī published his last book to date, ^CAlamāt Mahjūra (Neglected Landmarks). This is a collection of articles already published between 1957 and 1967. The articles deal with the origins of journalism in Egypt, the struggle waged by ^CUmar al-Mukhtār against Italian facism, individualism and contradictions in history and other topics - all of which, due to them having previously been published in newspapers and magazines, are treated in a general, impressionistic manner.

In any serious attempt to understand how al-Quwayrī portrays female characters in his short stories, mention should be made of the fact that his reference to Egyptian writers whose work he studied deeply does not reveal sufficient awareness, on his part, of the attitude of such writers towards the problems of Arab women in general. In his memoirs, al-Quwayrī seems to have been unaware of the positive role of women⁽¹⁾ as envisaged, for example, by

1. Al-Quwayrī, Al-Waqadāt, p.48 ff.

Marxism. This is despite the fact that his reminiscences clearly indicate that in his early contacts with Egyptians at Cairo University he gave deep thought to the significance of the fundamental concepts of Marxism.

It is noteworthy that al-Quwayrī's reaction to these concepts was intuitive rather than intellectual. This is due to the fact that his real preoccupation, even at that period of his life, was primarily with problems of artistic creation. When he entered Cairo University in 1951, it was full of conflicting intellectual movements. According to his own testimony, he felt like a simple Upper Egyptian (Sa^cidī) in the company of left-wing intellectuals who exhibited a deep interest in literary aesthetics and Marxism. A colleague, referred to as William in the memoirs, seems to have aroused al-Quwayrī's interest in these intellectual problems. He often held discussions with William about Dr. Rashid al-Barrawī's Arabic translation of volume I of Marx's Das Kapital and the meaning of dialectical materialism.⁽¹⁾ References abound in the memoirs about the significance of socialist realism for young Arab writers and the important relationship between

1. Ibid, pp.48-49.

the socio-economic conditions prevalent in society and their role in shaping and determining the writer's outlook upon reality. In the case of al-Quwayrī, such an outlook, although intellectually shaped by doctrines of realism in literary theory which were prevalent in Egypt in the fifties, leaves no room for a positive role for women in his short stories.

It seems likely, however, that the relationship between literature and the feminist movement in Egypt was not thrown into bold relief in the literary discussions of the period, nor was it as clearly felt as the relationship between literature and the social structure as a whole. This explains, as we shall see, why al-Quwayrī, despite his interest in problems of class consciousness and other social problems in Egypt, was not fully aware of the significance of the feminist movement for Libyan women and its positive, progressive role as potential material for literary creation.

The memoirs show clearly that al-Quwayrī never joined any political party or movement. In fact, he was accused of being an ineffectual intellectual with no real interest in political action;⁽¹⁾ this lack of interest is due to the

1. Al-Quwayrī, Al-Waqadāt, p.73.

fact that he considered himself primarily an artist. He himself admits that he could not probably overcome the 'idealist' bent of his thinking, both moral and social, which went hand in hand with his belief in literary realism.⁽¹⁾ Unlike the majority of his colleagues and friends, he did not want to belong firmly and unequivocally to any political organization in Egypt.

It is a reasonable supposition that al-Quwayrī's real preoccupation, during the formative years of his intellectual development and during his university career in Cairo, was with short story writing as a possible means of overcoming his alienation in Egypt. This sense of alienation is attributable to the fact that he considered himself to be, first and foremost, a Libyan writer living in exile. Despite his estrangement in Cairo, it seems that he felt at home in Upper Egypt because the way of life there, in many ways, suited his temperament. Al-Quwayrī lavished praise on the traditions and customs in al-Minyā province, affirming that Upper Egyptians, as a whole, had proved invulnerable to invasion in their more remote areas. However his memoirs make no reference to the positive role

1. Unpublished Interviews.

of women in Upper Egypt or to the way in which they help their husbands in the fields. In those remote areas, as indeed in the countryside in Lower Egypt, married women as a rule do not, unlike their counterparts in the cities, wear the veil. Al-Quwayrī was impressed by the culture of the Upper Egyptians but, like al-ʿAqqād, Tawfīq al-Ḥakīm or even Najīb Maḥfūz at the time, the issue of women's liberation does not, as we shall see, loom large in his work.

An important and interesting problem is raised by al-Quwayrī in connection with the differences that obtain between the Libyan character and that of the Upper Egyptian. These differences are important since the distinctive quality of Libyan culture plays a significant role in his short stories. Unlike what he saw and felt in Upper Egypt, he feels that the Libyan way of life is characterized by anxiety and an incessant search for ways and means to gain a livelihood through trade, business and other occupations, all of which differ from the main agricultural occupations in Upper Egypt.⁽¹⁾ The harsh conditions of desert life have, according to al-Quwayrī, shaped and conditioned the Libyan character and, for this reason, Libyans have a

1. Al-Quwayrī, Al-Waqadāt, p.89.

remarkable power of endurance that enables them to withstand all kinds of disasters and problems.⁽¹⁾ Yet, they are also motivated, under normal circumstances, by a very real desire to resist all manner of evil and injustice in their cultural and social environment. Whereas misery in Libya is due to uncertainty, conflict, or movement, in Upper Egypt it is primarily and ultimately due to rigidity, 'immobilism', a quiet life and acceptance of authority or fate.⁽²⁾

It is noteworthy that al-Quwayrī refers, in this connection, to the views of Tawfīq al-Ḥakīm on the quality of the Egyptian way of life and the ancient history of Egypt. He quotes al-Ḥakīm's views, not on the position of women in Egyptian society, for example - a problem in which this Egyptian writer was not particularly interested - but on the contribution made by the Egyptian peasants to the concept of overcoming time and temporal change by achieving the permanence of the pyramids. Al-Quwayrī's point is that the Egyptians aimed thereby to achieve immortality through continuity. The Libyans, by contrast, are not characterized by submission to authority but by love

1. Ibid.

2. Ibid.

of freedom; the vast desert is a symbol, in his memoirs, of freedom from the restrictions imposed by Egyptian civilization.⁽¹⁾

In all these speculations, al-Quwayrī seems to adopt a conventional attitude towards women which is no different from that adopted by the Egyptian authors and which he wrote about in his memoirs. Intellectually, this attitude was, by and large, determined by his upbringing in the al-Minyā province and is something that cannot be ignored in any serious attempt to understand his short stories. His observations on the behaviour of uneducated women in Upper Egypt⁽²⁾ did not elicit any positive feeling on the part of al-Quwayrī as to the need for change and improvement in the status of women in Arab society. A more positive response might have been possible and might have found its outlet in artistic form, if his attention had been drawn to the real importance of this problem, because al-Quwayrī has often claimed that there are close connections between art and reality. In this connection, it is interesting to note that al-Quwayrī refers approvingly to the issue of commitment in

1. Ibid, pp.89-90.

2. Ibid, p.

literature.⁽¹⁾ He stresses the importance of what he calls the 'dialogue' between the artist and society, referring to the fact that the artist, so conceived, is 'the product of his society'.⁽²⁾ The revolutionary ideas that al-Quwayrī deals with are important because they throw light on the sort of intellectual climate which he considers to be a favourable condition for artistic creation. The ideals of the French Revolution are accepted and defended by al-Quwayrī as progressive principles, despite the fact that, as he says, the French Revolution resulted in the installation of the bourgeoisie as rulers of France.⁽³⁾

From a serious study of the short stories of al-Quwayrī, it becomes clear that he is not fully aware of the socio-historical factors that have been responsible for the situation in which Libyan women find themselves at the present time. This is perhaps the reason why al-Quwayrī does not adequately convey the full dimensions of the problems that confront women in Libya. It is true that the experiences presented by any artist or writer are usually

1. Al-Quwayrī, Tāhūnat al-Shay' al-Mu^ctād, Tunis (1971), pp.14 ff.

2. Ibid, p.12

3. Al-Quwayrī, Ashyā' Basīṭa, Tripoli (1972), pp.39-40.

based on a selection of those elements that serve his purpose, but the problems raised by al-Quwayrī with regard to women's alienation are much more complex than he thinks.

Another reason why al-Quwayrī's conception of these problems is limited and hardly does justice to the concept of social alienation as felt by Libyan women is his exclusive interest in the politics of socialism, indeed in Marxism, without at the same time discussing the bearing of these interests on women's liberation either in Libya or in any other Arab country. Al-Quwayrī's speculations on the nature of Marxism, coupled, as he himself admits in his memoirs, with a deep interest in mysticism, leave no room for women's liberation in his scheme of values. Problems of class distinction, the nature of feudal society, the political independence of Libya and Egypt and their need for liberation from Western imperialism, all loom large in al-Quwayrī's theoretical and philosophical writings and are much more strongly felt than his interest in female literary portraits.

There is also another reason, a particularly important one, for al-Quwayrī's lack of interest in the feminist movement in Libya. Literary reminiscences of al-Quwayrī, as expressed by many of his critics, friends and acquaintances,

do not suggest that women have played any significant role in shaping his outlook upon life. This is, perhaps, almost typical of many bourgeois or petit-bourgeois writers and thinkers who, at least in the forties, fifties and early sixties, were more interested in practical politics and in the relationship between politics and literature more than they were in any possible positive role for women in society. There are penetrating remarks, in al-Quwayrī's memoirs, on the social class structure but not on the need to change men's attitudes toward women. Thus, in dealing with the problems he encountered in his school education, al-Quwayrī refers to his attitude to his teacher as a guide, as a purveyor of knowledge and ideas, but no references are made to his attitude, or to his colleagues' attitudes, towards women, erotic matters and acute emotional problems. In his reflections, he recalls that pedigree, in the ethos of the village, was more important than education, individual effort or any desire to climb the social ladder. He says, for example, that:

The spirit of discipleship (i.e. my sense of apprenticeship) was never given up by me. Anyone who had acquired experience or expertise was a Master for me. This does not mean that I was always a mere recipient of others' experiences. It means that I never regarded as trivial or unimportant any activity

which might give a clue or a hint as to the hidden depths of the human soul.⁽¹⁾

Al-Quwayrī's relations with his teachers are explained against the background of the class structure and the desire to learn and discover more and more about life:-

My attitude to my teacher was akin to that of a novice to a Sheikh. This feeling was, perhaps, a direct outcome of the environment in which my family lived, where the teacher, outside the circle of my family, was neither respected nor highly esteemed. All that distinguished him from other people (in the eyes of society at large) was that he was literate. In fact, literacy did not call for great respect and was not regarded by other families as an important factor affecting the class status of the teacher. It did not bestow on him, in this respect, any special favour. This latter was closely affiliated to social origin and pedigree.⁽²⁾

What is immediately relevant to our purpose is that the environment in which al-Quwayrī lived did not inspire a favourable attitude among men towards the possibility of social or historical change in their approach to social hierarchy, women or literacy. This fundamental consideration is not without importance or significance in understanding al-Quwayrī's portrayal of women. In his short stories, women are, of course, allowed by society to have

1. Al-Quwayrī, Al-Waqadāt, p.23.

2. Ibid, p.25.

jobs and to co-operate with men in forming the new society but this relative mobility on the part of women is, at the same time, hampered by traditional ideology to which women in Libya are still enslaved. It is reasonable to suppose that the typical heroine or female protagonist in many of his short stories is torn between the traditional inherited values and the new social circumstances in which women are trying to find a place and a function.

Both as a thinker and as a short story writer, al-Quwayrī belongs to the same generation of Libyan writers that includes Ibrāhīm al-Faqīh, Khalīfa al-Tikbālī, Kāmil al-Maghūr and ʿAlī Muṣṭafā al-Miṣrātī. The literary production of this great generation of Libyan writers started in the fifties. Al-Quwayrī shares with all of these writers the same interest in social and political problems, but the circumstances of his birth and upbringing in Egypt make of his writings a special case-study. His deep interest in literature, like that of most Libyan writers of this period, is not a mere technical or formal issue but includes inevitable preoccupations with social and political problems in Libya. One of these problems is the portrayal of Libyan women in the short story. In the short stories written by al-Quwayrī up to 1956, his attitude to the relationship

between men and women was shaped, first and foremost, by the Egyptian social and cultural environment.

The rural environment in Upper Egypt was, according to a number of critics, no less important, as a determining factor, than the intellectual and literary influences that shaped al-Quwayrī's negative attitude towards women. It is a conventional attitude that derives from, and is intimately connected with, a characteristic rarely found in the other Libyan writers of al-Quwayrī's generation. This characteristic is the portrayal of apparently stable and immutable ways of agricultural life and their impact upon family ties. Al-Quwayrī's conception of women, as we shall see, did not, in the main, transcend this traditional framework despite his awareness of the conflict between two contradictory conceptions of women at that time. The traditional conception was, no doubt, a direct product of the way of life in Upper Egypt. It conflicted with modern conceptions of women and their important role as envisaged by Salāma Mūsa or Qāsim Amīn and their followers.⁽¹⁾ Unfortunately, however, the direct literary influence upon al-Quwayrī represented by Ṭaha Ḥussein, al-Ḥakīm or Najīb

1. See Mona Mikhail, Images of Arab Women, Washington, 1979 pp.23 ff.

Maḥfūz could not throw into bold relief the positive role of women from a literary point of view.

In an interview conducted with al-Quwayrī by the Libyan writer Ziyād ^cAlī⁽¹⁾, as well as in his memoirs, there are direct references to biographical details about the role of women in the life of al-Quwayrī. Reference is made, for example, to his shyness and passivity during his love affair with an Egyptian widow. Her husband was a judge who had died some years before al-Quwayrī met her. Despite her deep love for al-Quwayrī, he was psychologically inhibited because, in his opinion, it was morally wrong to have a love affair with a woman who had two children. Al-Quwayrī suffered from acute frustration during this affair because, inwardly, he had a deep desire to marry her but he could not articulate that desire. There were, no doubt, other love affairs (for example, in Tunisia), equally unhappy, and which all left a deep impression on his writing. This lack of positive articulation is closely connected with the emotional problems dealt with in the short stories of al-Quwayrī.

The conservative nature of the Libyan family is, to a

1. Unpublished Interviews.

great extent, reflected in al-Quwayrī's writings as a central factor responsible for the secondary and inferior position of women in Libyan society. In the Libyan family, the father behaves despotically towards his wife and daughters, who are not allowed the opportunity to meet other people outside the home. This situation prompts one to expect most Libyan writers to convey, from the literary point of view, a new vision in which Libyan women would be liberated. Unfortunately, however, such a vision of feminist liberation is not reflected in al-Quwayrī's writings. His short stories fail to give a clear picture of the need for the liberation of women despite his preoccupation with the state of underdevelopment and cultural backwardness of the Libyan family. This means that both subjective and objective factors contributed towards his negative approach to women.

The objective factor, as we have seen, is related to the general state of Libyan culture during the fifties and sixties. The subjective factor has already been referred to. It is noteworthy in this connection that al-Quwayrī's emotional relations were primarily with married women. In Tunisia, according to unpublished material, he had an affair with a married Tunisian woman. No positive outcome was,

however, possible because the very same emotional obstacle that wrecked his love in Egypt also affected this new relationship. In Egypt, apart from his shyness, the women's children were the only major hurdle. In Tunisia, the woman's continued references to her husband were certainly an inhibiting factor to also shock al-Quwayrī's refined sensibility. The same pattern, apparently, was often repeated during al-Quwayrī's visits to other places such as Lebanon, Stockholm and London. This pattern revealed and deepened the gulf in al-Quwayrī's mind between the ideal and the actual. The world of actuality brought about, or induced, an attitude of moral revulsion that eventually led to frustration and lack of self-realization. This biographical fact is extremely important in understanding al-Quwayrī's approach to his literary portrayal of Libyan women.

(B) The Literary Portrayal of Women

In many short stories in which the role of the woman is limited to her status in the home as a housewife, the main point to be noticed is that the woman is usually portrayed without any distinctive qualities. This means that al-Quwayrī does not provide us with many concrete details in

characterizing many of the women featured in his works. Instead of concentrating on, or even mentioning, such concrete details, al-Quwayrī is more interested in their state of mind - for example, anxiety, fear, suffering due to unrequited love, or the power and domination of the husband.

Critics frequently neglect this literary aspect vis-a-vis the concrete details that are so often lacking in the majority of short stories written by al-Quwayrī. Instead, the social or historical factors responsible for the inferior status of women in Libyan society are discussed. Fear and submission are the main features of the women portrayed in al-Quwayrī's writings. These negative qualities imply that the writer does not expect them to revolt; his attitude is naturalistic rather than critical. This naturalism is not so different from that of Emile Zola or Najīb Maḥfūz. It is an attitude, however, that is compatible with al-Quwayrī's traditional conception of the family as the basis of Libyan society.

The maternal or motherly role of women that is stressed in some stories can be easily detected as a reflection of al-Quwayrī's almost unconscious assumptions as to the place of women in the family. In this sense, the emphasis, in short stories that portray the family unit, is placed directly upon the role played by men, not women, in Libyan

society. In Ummahāt (Mothers),⁽¹⁾ the husband is an agricultural worker who is described as a politically committed young man who supports his immediate family and his mother. It is a situation in which the author adopts an impressionist technique to reveal the sufferings of simple, uneducated women who are compelled by circumstance to support themselves and bring up their children in the absence of their husbands.

When, in Ummahāt, the husband is arrested for political reasons, the main point which al-Quwayrī wishes to make is that the wife, like the mother before her, will be required to support the family. The mother had already assumed responsibility for bringing up her son - now the girl's husband - after the death of the father of the family. Now, the wife is also pregnant, and will be expected to play the same sacrificial role.

This role, the sacrificial one of women, is also emphasized in the short story entitled Al-Zaman (Time)⁽²⁾ in which an attitude of ingratitude is revealed towards an adoptive mother. After caring for the boy for a long time,

1. ^CAbdullah Al-Quwayrī, Sittūn Qiṣṣa Qaṣīra, Al-Dār al-^CArabiyya li al-Kitāb, Libya, (1977), pp.77 ff.

2. Al-Quwayrī, Al-Zayt wa al-Tamr, Al-Dār al-^CArabiyya li al-Kitāb, 2nd.ed., (1980), pp.21 ff.

he moves and lives away from her for a period of fifteen years. A pathetic picture is drawn of the meeting between the now young man and his adoptive mother in which an attitude of difference on his part is sharply contrasted with the warmth, kindness and self-sacrifice of the old woman. Al-Quwayrī gives a moving picture of this woman in her old age, her face full of wrinkles and living alone in a state of isolation and loneliness. Like other short stories in which the maternal instinct is prominent, there are, in fact, no new attitudes described that run counter to the traditional values of Libyan society, or to the hierarchy on which this system of values is based.

Another important theme that is of particular interest to al-Quwayrī is the inferior status of women in the sphere of marital relations. It is in this sphere that women are often, in a number of his short stories, treated as mere 'property'. This is a theme that not only involves the traditional role of women; it is a field or a set of complex relations and reactionary attitudes according to which women are given no opportunity to choose their husbands. In Nasīj al-Zalām (Web of Darkness)⁽¹⁾, this traditional role of bringing up children and of being 'obedient' to the husband

1. ^cAbdullah al-Quwayrī, Al-Zayt wa al-Tamr, pp.93 ff.

is all-important. Al-Quwayrī, in fact, implies that physical love, in this sense, is sharply separated, in Libyan society, from such important values as mutual affection, sympathy, co-operation in married life, and respect for the views or feelings of the wife in matters of love, divorce and marriage.

In the above-mentioned short story, a divorced wife, dissatisfied and unhappy, who has returned to the parental home is compelled by her parents to submit to fate and go back to her husband due to the lack of any other suitor to take her hand in marriage. A few hints are given about sexual dissatisfaction but the main point of the story is that the mother, in persuading her daughter to go back, is showing that her own life was not substantially different. Obedience to the husband was, and still is, the main principle upon which the traditional marriage is founded, irrespective of the misery suffered by the wife.

In Qarār al-Ḥaḍra (Family Decision),⁽¹⁾ the emotional frustration of the wife is due to the fact that in a closed society the woman has no right or opportunity to choose her own husband. In the case of incompatibility, the blame falls directly upon the wife who often suffers acutely in

1. ^cAbdullah al-Quwayrī, Sittūn, pp.209 ff.

such situations. In this story, which portrays realistically the position of women as the 'private property' of the man, al-Quwayrī's aim is to show that the absence of children engenders feelings of boredom and indifference on the part of the husband.

It is the woman, al-Quwayrī seems to imply, who is treated as a 'thing' in this framework of alienation and estrangement. The wife feels alienated from society; in the words of the story:

وأدركت مدى قيمتها، إنها مجرد شيء يمكن
أن يهمله، بل يكرمه في أي لحظة

She began to realize that if she meant anything at all to her husband it was merely as a 'thing' towards which the man could adopt an attitude of hatred or neglect at any moment.⁽¹⁾

This framework of social relations in which the woman is regarded as a means to an end, and thus suffers reification, creates, in this story, as well as in other short stories of the same thematic category, a serious obstacle to self-realization. This obstacle receives adequate treatment by virtue of the hints, gestures and indirect suggestions which are typical of al-Quwayrī's realistic method. One such hint

1. Ibid, p.209.

is discernible when the husband is told suddenly at the end of the story that the wife is pregnant. At that moment, the husband changes his attitude, almost unconsciously, and begins to express his love for his wife. This profitable insight is not only artistically valuable, it is psychologically revealing and convincing. What it reveals is that the wife, even now, does not believe that her husband loves her. In fact, her hatred and contempt for him become most evident and, as a result, her sense of fatalism gradually begins to disappear.

One of al-Quwayrī's short stories that embodies the traditional conception of women is ʿUrūq al-Dam (Veins of Blood);⁽¹⁾ it reveals woman as a one-dimensional creature with no interest other than that of producing and bringing up children. This limited world, one that is imposed on the woman and shaped by local culture, is almost unconsciously reflected in the short story and obviously receives prominence in those cases concerning women who are sterile.

Female sterility leads to often unnecessary suffering on the part of the woman. In this story, the uncle divorces his wife because he has assumed, wrongly, that she is barren, the truth being that he, himself, is sterile. The

1. Ibid, pp.350 ff.

victim, in this case, is the nephew who is forced to emigrate to the city in search of work. This apparent sympathy with the boy may be due to al-Quwayrī's real interest in children and their upbringing. In the immediate context of the story, the boy refuses to be sexually exploited by an old Italian woman who interviews him for the job he has applied for as a worker in an Italian hospital in Tripoli. Thematically, the problem of the father as the dominant force is also patently felt in the story.

Male dominance, as reflected in stories centred upon the Libyan family, is revealed as a social problem. This is the major theme of Al-Khātim (The Ring)⁽¹⁾: the dominance of the father over all members of the family is seen against the background of a business mentality, itself viewed as a source of social evil. In this story, the husband is often away from home on business. The son detests his father, who is a tyrannical, ill-tempered merchant who frequently returns home with a great deal of money which he proceeds to count, all alone, in one of the rooms. Following a particularly tense situation, the wife retires to a corner, alone with her meditations upon a long and wasted life in

1. Ibid, pp.260 ff.

which she has never known real happiness:

سكن جسد المرأة بعيدا ، في ركن قصي من الدار ،
وتراخت عضلاتها المترهلة بطبيعتها لقــــــد
كبرت .. شابت في هذه الأيام ، انها الأــــــزنان
أيام الشقاء
هــــــل
همست في مسكنة وتساءلت :
هل سعدت معه يوما ؟
أجابت نفسها مستنكرة أن يكمن مثل هذا السؤال
في نفسها .

The woman's body was motionless, away in a corner of the house. Her already flaccid muscles, were now flabby and much softer. She had grown up, become old, and now had grey hair. It was the distress, the days of misery:-

-Oh! She whispered in a humble voice, and then wondered:

- Was I ever happy with him, even for one day?

She answered her own question negatively, scarcely believing that she dared even ask it.⁽¹⁾

No further light is thrown upon the husband's tyranny save for the fact that his paternal authority and love of money, especially when the son and his mother leave the house after having had a row about the boy's gold ring. The wife had given the boy a piece of gold which belonged to her and he had exchanged it for the ring. The father apparently misunderstands the situation and, when wife and son

1. Ibid, p.263.

have escaped, he goes quietly to his room to count the money as usual. What the writer is stressing here, in his own subtle and indirect way, is that the husband is treating his wife as if she were his own private property, no different from the money he is counting. Symbolically, the father represents external authority, most likely symbolizing the ancien régime, as a serious impediment to the development and integration of the personality.⁽¹⁾

Al-Quwayrī treats this problem of paternal authority in its negative form from a variety of angles. In Māta Gharīban (He Died a Stranger),⁽²⁾ the father's drunkenness leads to ugly scenes of violence in the family but there is no question of an Oedipus complex developing in the son who evidently sympathizes with his mother. The mother is portrayed as an extremely miserable woman still affected by the death of her husband. Al-Quwayrī relies on the stream-of-consciousness technique in his portrayal of the main situations in which paternal power is abused. Complex imagery is used to convey the son's alienation and his attitude of both love and hatred towards the father.

1. See Aḥmad M. ʿAṭīyya, Fann al-Rajul al-Ṣaghīr fī al-Qiṣṣa al-ʿArabiyya al-Qaṣīra, Damascus (1977), p.204.

2. ʿAbdullah al-Quwayrī, Sittūn, pp.344, ff.

However, the boy cannot understand the acute distress felt by his mother who cries incessantly when the father dies. There is a flashback that reveals how the son had found himself a job and came to feel a certain independence. This is presumably a disguised indication of the emergence of individuality, of the growth of independence from the fetters of objective authority. However, one night, the father, who is drunk, holds a knife in his hand and seems about to kill his wife. The son prevents him by force and there ensue violent exchanges. As a result, the father leaves the house for ever and dies a stranger elsewhere.

The theme of the alienation of Libyan women and the suffering they have to endure in a highly conservative environment is objectively presented in a number of al-Quwayrī's short stories. Young girls in love are alienated in the sense that they are incapable of self-realization in a society wherein men and women are almost alien to one another, both emotionally and socially. This is the central theme of Al-Bint Kaburat (The Girl Grew Up)⁽¹⁾ in which the heroine ^cAwaysha cannot comprehend the symptoms or significance of her own feelings of puberty. Her strange feelings are objectively registered by al-Quwayrī, but there

1. Ibid, pp.192 ff.

are hints or suggestions as to the possibility of change in her life - in the life of Libyan women. These suggestions are, in fact, closely bound up with a carnival sense of the world,⁽¹⁾ which, as we shall see, implies the possibility of change. Thus, hardly aware of the significance of puberty for the new stage in her life, she was kissed (for the first time) by Muṣṭafā, a relative in the neighbourhood. Significantly, this on the day when her brother's wedding ceremony was being held:-

كانت ضعيفة في ذلك اليوم .. يوم الفرح
والفجيج حولها .. والنساء والأطفال والرجال، قد
يتقابل رجل وامرأة، فلا تغطي المرأة وجهها، وهي
مع الأطفال وليست معهم، تحاول أن تكون مع
النساء فلا تجد مجالا لها . فانفردت بعيدا تنظر،
حتى وجدها "مصطفى" منزوية فقبلها .. وجرت
كان للبيت رائحة، وللنساء رائحة ..
رائحة، وللرجال رائحة . شيء جديد.. شيء
جديد.. حياة جديدة ،

She was weak on that day, the day on which the wedding was held, with so much noise around her - women, children, men. A man and a woman may meet, without a woman veiling her face. She was with the children and not with those people; she tried to join the company of the women but could not find a place. So she went away, alone, looking far away until Muṣṭafā found her in a hidden corner. He kissed her and she ran away. Now home had a new smell; so did the women, and the men. A new thing. Entirely new. A new life.⁽²⁾

1. See Bakhtin, Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics, trans. Caryl Emerson, Manchester (1984), p.122

2. ^cAbdullah al-Quwayrī, Sittūn, pp.193-4.

The reference to the effect of the new experience upon the girl's sensibility has much point. The style in Arabic is deceptively easy, its power reflecting the new mode of perceiving reality as the girl is about to embark upon a new stage in her life. To carnivalize the experience is to imagine it in a different, changing context. As Bakhtiu remarks, the sense of socio-hierarchical inequality is suspended. The participants in a carnival are aware of this because their roles can be reversed or changed:

All distance between people is suspended, and a special carnival category goes into effect: free and familiar contact among people. This is a very important aspect of a carnival sense of the world. People who in life are separated by impenetratable hierarchical barriers enter into free familiar contact on the carnival square.⁽¹⁾

Just as the girl senses, as in a carnival, the joyful relativity of everything and starts a new stage in her life, so Libyan society emerges from the ancien régime to liberate men and women. Relics of that régime are, of course, still evident. It is perhaps a commonplace to note that young girls in Libya often wait for hours, hidden at the window, to see the young man of their dreams pass by the street. What is new, however, is that al-Quwayrī describes real love

1. Bakhtin, Problems, p.123.

only in fleeting moments in his short stories; the brevity of these moments is due to the still prevalent alienation of women in society. Al-Quwayrī's method throws considerable light on the complex problems arising from reification and opens up new vistas for change and hope.

This impact is most pronounced in Al-Yatīma (The Orphan Girl).⁽¹⁾ There is a direct emphasis in this story on the passive attitude of the girl who enjoyed happiness during her father's lifetime. After his death, she is put in the custody of her uncle who forces her to marry his son. It is noteworthy that the son is already happily married but he agrees to marry his cousin simply because he cannot ignore the instructions of his father. This authoritarian attitude on the part of the uncle represents, symbolically, the old regime. Although the girl is educated and apparently in love with a lawyer to whom she had been introduced by her father, she has no choice but to submit to her uncle's authority. From the artistic point of view, the dominance of the authoritarian attitude is a convincing symptom of al-Quwayrī's realism.

This realism is no different from what Lukacs, in his description of Thomas Mann's method, refers to as critical

1. ^cAbdullah al-Quwayrī, Sittūn, pp.290 ff.

realism.⁽¹⁾ In his polemics against traditional concepts of naturalism and realism, Lukacs stresses the importance of a critical perspective of reality, an outlook, in other words, which critically registers social contradictions in the real world. In the case of al-Quwayrī, this contradiction between the ideal and the actual - between the old regime and the modern consciousness - leads ultimately to an ending of the short story in which the old order of things still prevails over the new or potentially new ideal to which most Libyan writers aspire.

Al-Quwayrī provides a clear picture of the difficulties encountered by working women who wish to be economically independent. These difficulties come to prominence in the current period of transition into the age of industrialization. In Qaṭarāt min al-Āmal (Rays of Hope),⁽²⁾ there is an obvious emphasis on those factors which tend to make women more alienated in society.

The central female character in this story is a divorced woman who apparently led a happy life with her husband but was divorced by him after he had become addicted to drugs.

1. See G. Lukacs, The Meaning of Contemporary Realism, trans. John and Necke Mander, London (1969), pp.51-55, 107.

2. Ibid, pp.72 ff.

Al-Quwayrī wants to make the point that the new age in which women are sometimes forced to work in order to support themselves is not devoid of difficulties and problems that threaten traditional values. The divorcee has a job in a factory and receives a wage sufficient to support herself, her baby and her mother. The divorce has forced the woman to support herself but it also exposes her to harassment from a supervisor in the factory who makes advances towards her. Being highly respectable, she refuses to respond to him despite the fact that she suffers economically as a result of the financial penalties imposed upon her by the supervisor. This degradation and suffering, however, do not deprive her of a dream that her husband will one day come back to her. In other words, the traditional conception of the family is always at the back of al-Quwayrī's mind when he deals with the role of women in the modern period of the transitional age.

The theme of poor, working women who are forced to make a living in the countryside also receives attention in the short story Umm al-Khayr.⁽¹⁾ The premature death of Umm al-Khayr on her wedding night provides her mother with an opportunity to give valuable hints to the reader as to her

1. Ibid, pp.27 ff.

ability to support the family after her husband has also become ill. This theme of the working woman provides the background to the main situation in this short story.

The circumstances of the death of Umm al-Khayr are not clearly presented; there is a vivid picture of a procession of women, representing friends and relatives of Umm al-Khayr's mother, heading for the cemetery to mark the "Arba^cIn" - the ceremony held on the 40th day after death. A sympathetic account of the hard work, determination and suffering of the mother is given as follows:

كانت تسعى وتكد ، وتجري من أجل الحياة
في معبات كثيرة تمنع أشياء كثيرة تخبز في
البيوت ، تفتل الحبال ، تبيع الحلوى وعيدان
القصب للأطفال ، وابنتها " أم الخير " مازالت
صغيرة .
مات الرجل الذي لم يعقب غيرها
وتركها لم تتجاوز الخامسة .

She used to strive, to work hard, to go everywhere in search of a livelihood doing various kinds of jobs. She used to bake bread in people's houses, make rope, sell sweets and sugar-cane for the children. Her daughter, Umm al-Khayr, was still young. Her father, who had no other children, died when she was barely five years old.⁽¹⁾

The emphasis is on the great struggle which uneducated

1. Ibid, p.29.

women face in difficult circumstances. Al-Quwayrī portrays this struggle so as to convey the message that women in the lower strata of Arab society can, and often do, demonstrate strength and determination to overcome the many obstacles and difficulties which they encounter in their everyday lives.

The difficulties which confront poor women who are forced to fend for themselves by carrying out menial jobs or doing manual work are clearly presented by al-Quwayrī as having an important effect on the structure of the family unit. He is not primarily concerned with the break-up of the traditional family; this is not, usually, a major issue in modern Libyan literature. Rather, he is presumably interested in demonstrating the extent to which Libyan women are bound to suffer in the transitional stage. If illiteracy or lack of education is responsible for the alienation of women in the modern age, there is still the problem of the extent to which they can adjust to a new situation in which they are supposed to support themselves. The artistic method adopted by al-Quwayrī relies upon the technique of indirectly conveying the relevant experience.

In Haṣal Khayr (No Harm Done),⁽¹⁾ the central female

1. Ibid, pp.65 ff.

character, Umm Sayyid, is a woman who makes a living selling meat in town. She is supporting her children, one of whom is a baby that she takes to the market with her. The other is a young boy who has had an argument with his mother about money and the situation between the two of them deteriorates because the mother has no money to spare for him.

Umm Sayyid, who is apparently divorced and has married again, promises to give her son the money he wants on a subsequent market day. Passers-by crowd to the scene as the mother exchanges angry words when they exchange angry words with the boy when he tries to snatch some meat away from her. A man, seemingly a stranger or, at least, a newcomer to the market, offers to give the boy the money he wants, but the son rejects his offer.

The argument reveals that the boy resents the fact that his mother has married again. When the situation between them calms down, she turns to the people present and blames them for not preventing the row between herself and her son. But someone replies, with unmistakeable indifference, that no real harm was done.

Al-Quwayrī's aim is to provide us with an idea as to the misery which engulfs uneducated and simple women in Libyan society when they are constrained to work and to be independent. This ideological objective is so powerful that

al-Quwayrī neglects concrete details about the woman's looks, her background, or the circumstances that have brought about her misery. The theme of uneducated women who are left to fend for themselves in Libyan society is particularly important.

(C) Literary Concepts Relevant to Character Portrayal

An important point that throws light on al-Quwayrī's technique is the delicate balance which he manages to maintain between the nature of the short story as an art-form and the social claims which were made upon art during the fifties and sixties. In an interview conducted in 1983⁽¹⁾, there are clear indications that al-Quwayrī is totally aware of the theoretical problems raised in connection with commitment in literature. The balance in question is maintained as a result of al-Quwayrī's adoption of the method of indirect presentation of human experience. It is safe to assume, in this respect, that al-Quwayrī avoids any recourse to direct statements because he is fully aware that such statements, especially in the short story, are bound to have an adverse effect on the integrity of the experiences presented by the writer.

1. Unpublished Interviews.

It is in the light of his belief in the relative autonomy of the short story that al-Quwayrī defines the doctrine of commitment in literature. Referring, in retrospect, to this doctrine in 1983, al-Quwayrī brilliantly stresses the point that his concept of commitment is based upon critical, rather than naturalistic, realism. It is a concept which he probably arrived at intuitively more than through reading Lukacs. Critical realism, he maintains, is different from a naive acceptance or propagation of political doctrines, abstractly conceived, or 'party line' attitudes. Thus al-Quwayrī makes clear this point when he says:

We have mistaken commitment for direct political affiliation. Political affiliations, whether taken in the sense of being affiliated to a party or to a general political cause to be exploited for political objectives, or for certain slogans, are all matters which never affect people deeply. These blatant, obtrusive considerations never affect the human soul and have nothing to do with art. Neither do they, contrary to the claims of some critics, affect the masses.⁽¹⁾

Al-Quwayrī argues, in line with these reflections, that art should, in his own words, be indirect - it is the "crystallized human soul in its purest form".⁽²⁾ He

1. Akhbār al-Khalīj, September 9, 1983, Part I.

2. Ibid.

emphasizes what he calls "the moment of purgation" which the short story occasions as a result of its organic growth. This is a concept which, in the literary polemics in Egypt in the late fifties and sixties, al-Quwayrī must have derived from the writings of leading Egyptian critics.

This reference to moments of purgation is fundamentally Aristotelian. It is fully elucidated in the writings of Rashād Rushdī and other critics.⁽¹⁾ If the content of the short story is rightly claimed to be realistic, the total effect made is psychologically cathartic. Al-Quwayrī does not mean that it is, as in Aristotle, limited to pity and fear. Purgation, or aesthetic effect, should be taken in an extremely wide sense. The effect is persuasively evoked when the structure is organic rather than mechanical. This is a fundamental feature of al-Quwayrī's short stories as a whole. It enables him to steer a cautious line between the Scylla of aesthetic integrity and the Charybdis of the claims of realism. That may well be the reason why he does not consciously set out to portray Libyan or Arab women as liberated - a concept which would definitely be a false representation of the real state of affairs. What al-Quwayrī is primarily interested in is not the sociological

1. Rashād Rushdī, Nazariyyat al-Drāmā, Cairo (n.d.), pp.1-8.

problem of women's liberation or of human liberation as a political issue; he is primarily concerned with the effect of organic structure upon the reader. This effect, he maintains, is more persuasively evoked when the experience is organically presented. Thus, Al-Quwayrī writes:

The short story, in my opinion, is that concentrated moment by which one can present an aspect of a certain character, or an opinion, a problem, an atmosphere or movement. What happens is that the writer recalls such a moment, concentrates it fully, and then releases it in tranquillity by using artistic devices which may be summed up as the reverberations of certain meanings, the gestures of words, their associations within certain sentences, phrases in a dialogue, in a perfect compatibility of verbal expression and psychological effect.⁽¹⁾

These remarks on the aesthetic problems raised in connection with the short story are, as expected, perfectly compatible with al-Quwayrī's belief that "narrow-minded" commitment to a political cause, or an ideological belief is likely to be detrimental to the work of art itself, whether it be short story, poem or any other genre. Al-Quwayrī raises these theoretical problems, especially the relationship between ideology and the short story, stating that commitment for the realist writer should be taken in an

1. Akhbār al-Khalīj, op.cit.

extremely wide sense. What he condemns, in fact, is any attempt to define, or impose on the artist, any preconceived set of political or moral principles. Artistic creation requires that the writer should transcend any such ideology which may raise a barrier before the writer's vision of reality. This is why al-Quwayrī refused to present an explicit theoretical account of the problems with which he was preoccupied as ideological problems. He makes the point that the relationship between art and ideology is much more complex than many Libyan intellectuals imagine:

Can the writer, in our undeveloped world, determine one single cause or issue, or a set of causes or issues occupying his mind, and to which he devotes his time and energy? I do not think so . . . I cannot say that I showed no interest in the problems of literature and art and their relation to life. I cannot say, either, that I was not intellectually interested in the problem of the liberation of women. Nor can I deny that I was always keen on social justice, liberation, the brotherhood of the human race; indeed, on all the problems raised and advocated by the various thinkers, world organizations, etc. But how far, or to what extent, I was convinced of the serious spirit in which these issues were discussed - that is the real problem. Often I felt that these things were being discussed in a spirit suggestive of levity and lack of seriousness. Behind these issues lay some (selfish) political or economic motives or interests. Hence my disappointment.⁽¹⁾

1. Interview with al-Quwayrī published in "al-Sha^Cb", Algiers, March 14, 1979.

The relationship between the short story as a work of art and Libyan society, of which the artist is a member, is a central problem in al-Quwayrī's literary aesthetics. But, like most Arab writers, he discusses its implications and significance against the background of his deep social and moral concerns. If the indirect method of artistic creation is favoured by al-Quwayrī for purely artistic reasons, it is also a method related to his polemics which often centre on modernization versus traditionalism in Libya. His central argument is that antiquated attitudes and beliefs, which are associated with, or produced by, the traditional culture of Libya, constrain the writer to resort to indirect methods of artistic expression.⁽¹⁾ He maintains that in any society which has been hindered from development, culture will be unable to develop in any sense:

Culture amounts to movement, to interaction; it means the transmission of experiences as well as renovations. If this is so, how can a society which rejects all the factors making for change, and which fears anything new, understand or absorb the meaning of culture? The individual, in such a society, will not realize the significance of any new idea introduced by any writer.⁽²⁾

1. ʿAbdullah al-Quwayrī, Tāhūnat, pp.48 ff.

2. Ibid, pp.48-49.

The inevitable outcome, according to al-Quwayrī, is that the writer uses an indirect method of presentation, utilizing the language of gesture, hints, indirect suggestions.⁽¹⁾ In some cases, this method makes communication unnecessarily difficult since the process of comprehension, on the part of the reader, becomes difficult owing to possible ambiguities in the text. In these cases, says al-Quwayrī, "both the writer and the "serious" reader find themselves in circumstances which compel each to move in a special circle of his own."⁽²⁾ This comment explains why some short stories by al-Quwayrī do not easily communicate their "meaning" on a first reading. The total effect, in these instances, is necessarily ambiguous. Among these stories is Ḥayātuhum (Their Life), Ḥaṣal Khayr (No Harm Done), Al-Bint Kaburat (The Girl Grew Up), Ibtisām Lā Tunsā (An Unforgettable Smile) and others. In these short stories, the communication of meaning is rendered difficult. Al-Quwayrī does not interfere, by means of direct or indirect comments, with the development of the action. What makes his 'meaning' rather obscure is his recourse to

1. Ibid, p.51.

2. Ibid.

symbolism or other technical devices for which he finds no substitute in attempting to convey his vision of reality.

Al-Quwayrī's scattered comments on the nature of art are recorded not only in *Ṭāhūnat al-Shay' al-Mu^ctād* (Run of the Mill), from which the above quotations are taken, but also in *Indamā Taḍijju al-A^cmāq* (When The Depths of the Soul Cry). In the latter work, he attempts to establish legitimate and sound connections between artistic creation and the concept of human suffering:

Like any intellectual or philosophical work, the work of art involves suffering to an equal degree. For it is difficult to separate art from thought. However, one's psychological make-up is all-important in determining the trend to be favoured.⁽¹⁾

Al-Quwayrī is probably aware of the distinction between the creative suffering of the artist and the mental agony sometimes caused by intellectual and philosophical labour. Like T.S. Eliot⁽²⁾ and his followers, al-Quwayrī distinguishes between the man who suffers art and the man who creates. This is why, as I have already indicated, there is little or no personal comment, of a direct socio-

1. Al-Quwayrī, *Indamā Taḍijju al-A^cmāq*, Tripoli (1973), p.41.

2. T.S. Eliot, *Selected Essays*, London (1969), p.18.

political nature, on the action or any happenings in the majority of his short stories. What his method implies is that the reader should be allowed the freedom to interpret the experience in terms of its total effect without total reliance, as in minor writers, upon the author's views and comments. In this connection, al-Quwayrī stresses that the work of art, as he conceives it, "must have its symbolic aspects, however obvious they may be."⁽¹⁾ In other words, however concrete or immediate the experience may be, it contains, as embodied in his short stories, a symbolic element which is essential for the process of interpretation. In this sense, al-Quwayrī is using the word "symbolic" in a special sense which is relevant to his method of indirect presentation. That explains why, in his view, objectivity in criticism cannot be separated from interpretation, even if the critic arrives at conclusions or meanings which may be totally different from the writer's original intentions. Thus al-Quwayrī says:

Objective criticism is a creative process undertaken by the critic for interpreting the work of art and throwing into bold relief those aspects which remain hidden to the ordinary reader. In this process, the critic may differ from the writer and

1. Al-Quwayrī, ḤIndamā, p.41.

may point out to him many defects either in the form or the content of the work of art. This is something which should not arouse anger or resentment in the creator of the work. For the critic, in doing so, is related to the creator in more than one way. He is, in fact, carrying out a new creative process; it is as though the object of that process were, in fact, the work of art being criticized.⁽¹⁾

This means that objectivity, as al-Quwayrī defines it for the critic, is different from scientific objectivity. It is ultimately based on the assumption that the realities of social or personal experience do not require the same criteria used in physics, particularly that of strict correspondence between propositions and the nature of reality as this is understood by scientists or physicists. What the critic needs is to give convincing reasons based on objective facts relevant to the work of art in question, in support of the point of view which he adopts.⁽²⁾

One interesting feature of al-Quwayrī's development is the way he moves from the traditional concept of realism, of registering objective details, into experimental or expressionist techniques which he did not hesitate to use to

1. Ibid, p.47.

2. On analysis as a constructive and creative process, see R.P. Bilan, The Literary Criticism of F.R. Leavis, Cambridge (1979), p.75.

develop his literary method. As has already been said, the expressionist element reveals itself pre-eminently in the use of suggestion and symbolism. It is this evocative use of symbolist or suggestive language which enables al-Quwayrī to transcend the stage of the direct approach which can be easily detected in his collection of short stories entitled *Ḥayātuhum* (1960). Starting from 1961, in which he wrote *Al-Zayt wa al-Tamr* (Oil and Dates), this interest in symbolist and expressionist techniques continues in varying degrees in *Al-ʿId fī al-Arḍ* (The Feast on Earth), published in 1963, as well as in *Al-Furṣa wa al-Qannāṣ* (The Opportunity and the Hunter) and *Qitʿa min Khubz* (A Piece of Bread) which were published in 1965.

This does not mean, however, that his interest in experimental methods of literary expression excludes the element of realism from his work. It is reasonable to suppose that al-Quwayrī's work combines elements of realism, symbolism and expressionism and does so as a result of his maturity and many-sided interests. That is why we feel that he uses, increasingly after 1960, important literary devices such as the interior monologue, the flashback, and the stream-of-consciousness technique, devices which should be regarded as an integral part of the development of the action and which are important for the organic structure of

the short story. Through these devices, particularly the stream-of-consciousness, al-Quwayrī aims at juxtaposing the present and the past, thereby deepening and enriching the structure of the experience and its impact upon the reader. Al-Quwayrī usually starts the main situation of the short story in medias res, so that we immediately find ourselves gripped by the inevitable development of events. At the same time, the stream-of-consciousness technique enables al-Quwayrī to consolidate and deepen the inevitable connection of the present with the past and to move in any direction he deems fit. In Qaṭarāt min al-Āmal (Rays of Hope),⁽¹⁾ for example, the action moves, as it were, from the denouement backwards as we see the heroine in great despair; through the flashback we gain access to the past events which ultimately lead to the denouement. This method of linking the present with the past, which gives the writer more freedom than is usually allowed by the traditional concept of narrative time as temporal continuity according to the Aristotelian theory of action as beginning, middle and end, is successfully and convincingly used by al-Quwayrī. As a result of this technique, al-Quwayrī reveals the significance of the various events which make up the story,

1. ^cAbdullah al-Quwayrī, Sittūn, pp.72 ff.

because he is able to start the action at any time he chooses, not necessarily at the beginning in the conventional, narrative sense. The distinction between the early reliance upon statement, as in Ḥayātuhum, and the later, dramatic mode of presentation, can be made clear by citing typical situations.

In the short story entitled Ḥayātuhum,⁽¹⁾ which gives its title to the collection of short stories published in 1960, there are the typical defects that are often caused by the narrative method. This is a story involving several characters and many realistic details are given of the 1956 Anglo-French attack on Egypt. Al-Quwayrī's intention is to portray the circumstances of these characters while their country is being attacked - a theme which is presumably more appropriate for a novel and which, in al-Quwayrī's hands, gives rise to a series of episodes directly stated rather than dramatically rendered. As a result of this direct mode of presentation, there are, in this collection, no distinctive characters with a life of their own and the concept of organic development of events is lacking.

This concept, by contrast, is conspicuously present in most short stories written in the dramatic mode after 1960.

1. Ibid, pp.121 ff.

What is artistically appealing about al-Quwayrī's writings after that date is his conscious attempt to get rid of the negative aspects of direct narrative. His purpose as an artist is to abandon the episodic to present an organic structure. This emphasis upon the organic structure of human experience is closely bound up with the inevitable development of the action. Thus, we find in such stories as Fulla,⁽¹⁾ Aḥlām fī al-Kā's (Dreams in a Cup),⁽²⁾ or Ghannī Ya Hawwa (Sing, Hawwa),⁽³⁾ that the various elements comprising the experience are all sufficiently interactive and, consequently, contribute to the total effect evoked by the story. These stories, like all the other stories included in the collection entitled Qitḥa min al-Khubz, are artistically successful and embody the theme of human alienation. There are, in these stories, significant moments or moods of alienation, as in Ghannī ya Hawwa, which reveals the alienation of the little girl who finds refuge in a song when her father escapes from the village. The action inevitably develops from the inner dynamics of the situation and is not imposed from without. The father, afraid of punishment for stealing, flees, but the song he

1. ʿAbdullah al-Quwayrī, Sittūn, pp.189 ff.

2. Ibid, pp.245 ff.

3. Ibid, pp.312 ff.

used to sing for the daughter continues:

وارتفع صوتها يردد مع الصوت الخشن كلمات
ابيه يعاتبها . فقد يعود يوما منتصرا على
الزمن ، ذلل الحزن وبقيت كلمات ابيها
تردد في القرية .
وسكتت لحظات ثم ارتفع صوتها بكلماتها هي تغني
في فرح ، تعاتبه .
وقالت شفاة كثيرة :
حواء تغني
ولم تعد وحيدة ، واغانيها تردد على
الشفاة .

Her voice became louder, repeating the same words, which were (once) spoken by her father's hoarse voice in recrimination. Her father, she felt, might come back, having won a victory in the severe struggles in this world. Her father's words continued to be chanted, as in a chorus, by the whole village. She fell silent for a few moments. Then her voice became louder as she blissfully reiterated the words, blaming her father for his absence. Many other voices joined her, saying "Hawwa is singing". She was no longer lonely. Her songs were on the lips of the people⁽¹⁾

This passage is, in fact, a hymn to joy at the heart of what is portrayed as Hawwa's tragedy. It is as though al-Quwayrī himself, using an epiphanic method of revealing rather than narrating the story, were blissfully impressed by the fact that Hawwa finds solace in the art of singing. There is a subtle transition from 'Hawwa is singing' to the

1. Ibid, p.316.

fact that her very songs begin to be chanted by the people of the village. Thus al-Quwayrī conveys a carnival sense of the world in that personal suffering, in the case of Hawwa, conduces to a collective response indicating a potential change of the situation. The polyphonic⁽¹⁾ nature of al-Quwayrī's art reveals itself in the fact that Hawwa's state of consciousness merges neither with al-Quwayrī's nor with the crowd's. Her autonomous consciousness is preserved and is not lost in a Nirvana type of mysticism in which individuality is lost. From the artistic point of view, the passage quoted above is an integral part of the story. There are inevitable connections between the various elements of this experience: the father's feeling of fear and his inability to face the people of the village as a thief (though he stole only in order to feed his daughter); Hawwa's loneliness as she is left alone at the top of the mountain; her ability to imagine, to absorb the situation and to hear her absent father's voice; her impulses to sing aloud; then the response of the people of the village. This organic necessity helps to evoke the total effect.

The same organic approach applies to the collection of short stories entitled *Al-^CId fī al-Ard*, which takes its

1. Bakhtin, Problems, pp.6-7.

title from one of the short stories of that collection of 1963. In this collection, we note al-Quwayrī's social and moral concerns, such as his interest in the effect of the environment on working-class children, but these interests are interwoven with various human situations. In the short story Al-ʿId fī al-Ard,⁽¹⁾ the experiences of the two boys who fend for themselves and live from hand to mouth by selling sweets in street cafes, are dramatically rendered without personal comment on the part of the narrator. The ʿId for most people is a happy occasion, but for these two boys it means that they do not easily find customers (to whom they can sell sweets) because almost all are at home. In Iʿtirāf (Confession),⁽²⁾ which belongs to the same collection, the theme of loneliness and spiritual suffering is treated in the same dramatic mode for which al-Quwayrī uses internal monologues to recall the past and its bearing upon the present. The number of stories which receive the same successful treatment in the work of al-Quwayrī is almost countless.

The use of suggestive language, which is, in fact,

1. Ibid, pp.150 ff.

2. Ibid, pp.263 ff.

directly opposed to direct statement, can be illustrated by the choice of the word 'maqhūra'. It is suggestive in the sense that it symbolizes the oppressed state of mind, the process to which the central female character of I^ctirāf is subjected as well as the end-product of that process of subjection. Similarly, the description of the desolate cafes in the city on the feast-day, as seen from the point of view of the first protagonist of the story, is deeply touching. It is dramatically presented by the use of words and phrases such as خلت من روادها (the cafe was empty of its regular customers), مكان مظلم a dark, gloomy spot), ركن حائط قديم متهدم (the corner of an old, dilapidated wall),⁽¹⁾ etc. These evocations contrast sharply with the gaiety and merriment usually associated in Libya and other Moslem countries with the Feast-Day or ^cId as an important social and religious occasion.

It is noteworthy that al-Quwayrī pays particular attention to the problem of character-portrayal, both male and female, in order to make his dramatic mode more effective. It is because he does not conceive of the short story as a means of directly preaching or propagating

1. Ibid, p.150.

certain beliefs or doctrines, as in propagandist literature, that he avoids characterization in black and white terms. This is to say that the characters that appear in his short stories are not one-dimensional. They have such multiple dimensions as would befit the occasion. This judgement as to the complexity of his character portrayal remains valid despite the fact that al-Quwayrī is less interested in external details than in the internal or mental life of his characters.

In Qaṭarāt min al-Āmal,⁽¹⁾ for example, the emphasis is rather upon the negative attitudes of the heroine towards the superintendent in the factory, but not upon her physical features. Nor do we know much about the physical appearance of most characters, though the insertion of these physical qualities might have enhanced our interest in the development of the action. It is the effect of this development upon the psyche of the characters, upon their moods and feelings, which arouses the interest of al-Quwayrī. Thus, in Qarār al-Ḥaḍra (Family Decision),⁽²⁾ the sense of disenchantment felt by the heroine, who had wrongly assumed that her marriage would liberate her from the

1. ^cAbdullah al-Quwayrī, Sittūn, pp.72 ff.

2. Ibid, pp.209 ff.

restrictions imposed by her conservative family, is the main point of the story. Similarly, in Al-Khātīm (The Ring),⁽¹⁾ the flashback to the heroine's past regarding the way in which she has always been treated by her commercially-minded husband, receives more prominence than any concrete detail about the appearance of the wife, the husband or the son. This lack of concrete detail characterizes the technique used by al-Quwayrī in portraying both men and women in his short stories.

There is, at the same time, a remarkable interest in new philosophical themes that are intellectually stimulating and which differ significantly from his earlier interest in realism. This interest in new themes becomes apparent, and acquires more importance, as al-Quwayrī becomes increasingly aware of the problem of alienation as a social phenomenon. In **Al-Zayt wa al-Tamr** which was published in Tunis in 1967, the theme of migration to towns from the countryside gives us a clear idea of the extent to which al-Quwayrī is aware of the effect of the new way of life on the family. If the traditional way of life, associated with agriculture and pastoral environment, is abandoned for economic and social reasons, the new life in the city is marked, as in **Al-Zayt**

1. Ibid, pp.260 ff.

wa al-Tamr, by the danger of alienation of the poorer sections of the population. The conflict between the two generations, between the old and the new, is symbolically expressed by the conflict between the mother as a symbol of the conservative spirit, and the younger son, as a symbol of the new generation. The conflict is resolved at the expense of traditional values. Symbolism and the use of the stream-of-consciousness technique are used and convincingly exploited to express the writer's attitudes towards the conflict in question and its repercussions both at the social and psychological levels.

In Al-Rajul wa al-Ḥamām (The Pigeon-Man)⁽¹⁾ the sense of alienation and the need for "we",⁽²⁾ or for other people, is given concrete expression by the use of symbolism.⁽³⁾ The old man in the story keeps pigeons in his house to provide him with company in his old age and loneliness, but they die one after the other. The sense of a desolate reality, caused by man's loneliness is not, however, a symptom of defeatism on al-Quwayrī's part, but is organically related to the quest for meaning and the search for identity.

1. ʿAbdullah al-Quwayrī, Al-Zayt wa al-Tamr, pp.31 ff.

2. George Thomson, Marxism and Poetry, London (1975), pp.60-61.

3. Ibid.

Many characters in the short stories of al-Quwayrī use the colloquial language which is consonant with their background. It is a remarkable fact that their dialectal use of Arabic, whether in Egypt or in Libya, is often in perfect harmony with the mental state or psychological mood in which they find themselves.

There is no doubt that dialogue is an important and integral aspect of al-Quwayrī's technique. He relies upon dialogue as a means of characterization since the main situations in which he is really interested are dramatic situations. As mentioned above, al-Quwayrī does not interfere with the action but leaves the characters free to act, speak or express their feelings through appropriate use of language.

It is noteworthy that the use of colloquial Arabic makes his stories truly realistic. In his collection entitled **Ḥayātuhum**, published in 1960, al-Quwayrī draws upon his experience in Egypt and reveals a great knowledge of the current use of Arabic whether among the poor, working classes, or among the middle classes to which he belongs. Folkloric expressions and idioms which are used in Upper Egypt are used in some of his short stories.

In the short story Niṣf Faddān (Half a Feddan),⁽¹⁾ al-Quwayrī expresses great admiration for, and interest in, the values of love and work. In expressing these values, al-Quwayrī lets the peasant woman, Futūḥ, express herself in a simple language. At the same time, he is not carried away by rhetoric or any flights of imagination in describing the feelings of his heroine or the beauty of nature. Futūḥ's only preoccupation is with making her husband happy. She is married because she thinks that hard work might have a harmful effect on him. Speaking to her husband, she says in colloquial (Egyptian) Arabic:

ياراجل ارحم روحك .. انت متأكد من
نفسك .. عايز تموت ..
يعني .. طيب .. انت ما تهملكش ... طيب
ومنصور .. ولنا .. واللي في بطني يروحوا
فــــين .

Oh, my dear man! Have pity on yourself. You don't worry at all about your state of health. Do you want to die? Probably you don't care if you live or die? . . . What about Maṣṣūr? What about myself or the baby I shall bear? Where would we go?⁽²⁾

It is difficult to convey in English the impression of affection and tenderness which al-Quwayrī wants to impress on his Arab readers. What is important, however, is that his choice of expressions, phrases and idioms matches the

1. ʿAbdullah al-Quwayrī, Sittūn, pp.32 ff.

2. Ibid, p.35.

personal, direct experience in the fields. That is why she says that anyone, finding himself there, contemplating the green beans and their growth, would feel the same happiness. The use of the plural at the end of the extract - 'and we would eat them raw' - is a triumph of al-Quwayrī's dialogic imagination. It is these structural and formal elements which have been unduly neglected by literary critics who are interested in al-Quwayrī's art. Among the most important is Aḥmad Muḥammad ^CAṭiyya who stresses al-Quwayrī's social and political commitments and belief in social justice without, though, indicating the relationship between art and ideology.⁽¹⁾ The problem of symbolism in the writings of al-Quwayrī has been briefly tackled by Mubārak Rabī^C who maintains that it is a technique closely connected with al-Quwayrī's pessimism as related to the social contradictions in Libyan society.⁽²⁾ This critic is perfectly aware of the 'revolutionary' content of some of the short stories, but he ignores the development of al-Quwayrī's technique from the narrative to the dramatic mode of presentation.

These views which have been expressed in connection with the content of al-Quwayrī's short stories have been

1. See his article, "Ḥiwār ma^Ca al-Mufakkir al-Lībī ^CAbdullah al-Quwayrī", Akhbār al-Khalīj, (1983)

2. Al-Sha^Cb, Algeria (1981).

subscribed to, discussed and shared by many writers. There have also been cursory references to the way in which al-Quwayrī uses the language of Upper Egyptians in his first collection of short stories. This point about language has been raised but not discussed in any detail by Najm al-Dīn Ghalib.⁽³⁾ This important topic has, unfortunately, not been fully dealt with. The way in which al-Quwayrī has been able to manipulate formal elements, including language, in his writing has a direct bearing upon his status as a major writer; but the emphasis in the articles and stories by Fawzī al-Bishtī, Khalīfa Ḥusayn Muṣṭafā has been, more or less, placed upon the background of feudalism, social underdevelopment and other topics.

An interesting and important aspect of al-Quwayrī's art has been discussed by Amīn Māzin in a full-length study devoted to al-Quwayrī and his writings.⁽²⁾ This point concerns the influence of al-Quwayrī's experiments in drama upon his short stories. Māzin explicitly states that the various characters are more or less mouthpieces of al-Quwayrī himself, hardly aware of the distinction between the

1. See his article in Al-Fusūl al-Arbaʿa, (1973)

2. Amīn Māzin, Al-Qiṣṣa fī Adab ʿAbdullah al-Quwayrī, Tripoli (1983), p.

dramatic or impersonal mode and the subjective or personal method of expression.⁽¹⁾ What is true is that the dramatic quality of al-Quwayrī's writings began to develop gradually because it was the dominant quality of his imagination even before he attempted to write plays. Evidence for this can be easily provided if we refer to the dramatic element in his first collection of 1960 *Ḥayātuhum*, although, as has been suggested already, this element is, admittedly, less conspicuous than the narrative. His interest in drama, however, lies outside the scope of the present work.

* * *

1. Ibid, pp.65, 81.

CHAPTER II

AḤMAD IBRĀHĪM AL-FAQĪH

(A) Introducing Al-Faqīh

Aḥmad Ibrāhīm al-Faqīh is a leading short story writer who, like other writers of his generation, established a literary reputation in the sixties. Early literary efforts were made in the late fifties in periodicals, magazines and newspapers.

Born in the village of Misda in 1941, he came directly under the influence of local customs and traditions. This influence enabled him later to make use of the rural atmosphere in his short stories which he began to publish in collections in the mid-sixties: *Al-Baḥr Lā Mā'a Fīh* (No Water in the Sea) in 1966, *Irbiṭū Aḥzimat al-Maqā'id* (Fasten Seat Belts) in 1968, and *Ikhtafat al-Nujūm* (The Stars Disappeared) in 1976. He was awarded the literary prize for the Libyan short story in 1965. His literary activity began when his early pieces were published in Libyan newspapers in 1958 and in a number of Tunisian publications. Hārib min al-Madīna (Fugitive From The City) was published in the

Fezzān newspaper in 1958. His short story entitled Al-Baḥr Lā Mā'a Fīh was published in 1965 in the left-wing literary magazine 'Al-Kātib' which was then an extremely important literary-political periodical edited by Aḥmad Abbās Ṣāliḥ in Cairo.

In addition to writing short stories, al-Faḳīḥ also came to be known as an important columnist in more than one newspaper in Libya. There is, as we shall see, strong evidence that his work as a journalist left its mark on his technique. Two collections of his journalistic articles have been published: **Al-Ṣaḥrā' wa Ashjār al-Naḥl** (The Desert and the Oil Trees) in 1979 and **Kalimāt min Laylā Sulaymān** (Words From Laylā Sulayman) in 1981. While the first collection deals with general social problems, the second is of particular interest in that it gives direct expression to al-Faḳīḥ's views about the need for female emancipation in Libya in the light of the trend of modernization advocated by the Libyan Revolution of 1969.

Considerable light is shed by al-Faḳīḥ's rural upbringing upon the romanticism in his short stories. The rural background shows that, in his case, the man and the artist cannot be separated. By romanticism in this context, we mean the tendency to treat emotional problems or social

themes melodramatically or extravagantly to the detriment of verisimilitude and realistic detail. This is the sense in which Lukacs considers the problem of romanticism as opposed to critical realism.⁽¹⁾ It is easy to feel these romantic experiences and the almost habitual, automatic response, in the work of al-Faqīh, to any situation in which women are involved. In this respect, his journalistic articles reveal the attitudes which prevail in his short stories. In particular, women in the short stories give the impression that they are not well-defined characters but are, as it were, creatures beset by strong feelings of suffering. What structurally renders these experiences ineffective and unconvincing is that they are directly presented. Their immediacy evokes, as we have just mentioned, a mechanical response. This is due to the fact that the structure of the experiences presented by al-Faqīh is, itself, mechanical, not organic.

As a result of this approach, there is an almost uniform picture of all the types of women in his short stories. They are almost all presented as conventional women conforming to the dictates of traditional or tribal society.

1. See Lukacs, The Meaning of Contemporary Realism, pp.93 ff.

There is a strongly felt passive element, revealing a blind acceptance of the existing state of affairs and showing no desire, motive or inclination to rebel or to improve their situation in Libyan society.

Another fundamental, linguistic weakness in al-Faqīh arises from the problems posed by diglossia (mushkilat al-Izdiwāj) in his work. The discrepancy between the current Arabic that he used in his journalistic contributions, and the more literary Arabic needed for his creative work as an artist, has affected his style in the short stories, rendering it more simplified than it should be. This is perhaps one of the main reasons why one can hardly find any authentic experience in his work, since the use of journalistic clichés and oft-repeated phraseology tends to simplify the complex experience of the modern Libyan woman. What I mean is the fact that al-Faqīh fails to make accessible to us what J. Middleton Murry refers to as the real power to bring out "universal significance in a personal and particular expression."⁽¹⁾ It is this power which is lacking in al-Faqīh's work because he is incapable of fusing the personal and the universal. Organic style, which reveals the inner growth of the action of the story,

1. J.M. Murry, The Problem of Style, London (1967), p.7.

is a fundamental means of achieving this fusion. It is what we find in great writers such as Tawfīq al-Ḥakīm, Najīb Maḥfūz and others. These writers, as is well known, often published social and political articles in newspapers and magazines. But, unlike al-Faḡīh, this journalistic activity did not have a negative effect on their creative work. The use of many colloquialisms in Arabic, in the work of many writers, is not a defect when these writers are capable of integrating colloquial language into their creative work, thus leading to a genuinely integrated linguistic medium, and to the indissoluble unity of form and content which is truly characteristic of their work. Examples of al-Faḡīh's inability to achieve this unity will be discussed as we proceed.

Al-Faḡīh remains content with registering phenomena as they immediately appear to him. This immediacy is probably consistent with the implications of artistic spontaneity or, as it is sometimes called in Arabic, 'improvised literature' (adab murtajal). Like many writers, not only in Libya but also in a number of other Arab countries, this phenomenon of "literary improvization" is obviously due to the fact that writers who work in journalism are often required to contribute regular material which is not supposed to deviate

from intellectual demands which are often dictated or encouraged by the establishment in the countries concerned. From the technical point of view, these pressures are evidently bound to determine the techniques and attitudes of writers and artists almost negatively.

In the collection **Al-Baḥr Lā Mā'a Fīh**, for example, this defect is immediately felt by the reader. It is because of the pernicious influences of his work as a journalist that the dimensions of human experience in this collection are not clearly felt. There are no suggestive devices or images or complex symbolism as we find in great writers. What is presented are experiences in the form of anecdotes rather than works of art in the full sense of the word. The artistic treatment of the themes presented in the stories cannot be described as successful. The experiences are presented as they are; they are not 'transmuted' through the medium of art.

The same weakness is inevitably felt in the collection **Irbiṭū Aḥzimat al-Maqā'id** because, as with the other collection, the action does not grow from within, but solely

from without. Interference with the action means, in this context, that the writer goes out of his way to piece together various happenings without an inherent, organic connection. As a result, the stories suffer from a lack of what Eliot calls the 'objective correlative'.⁽¹⁾ Al-Faqīh does not succeed in objectifying his experiences, feelings or ideas. It is because he resorts to direct statement rather than objectification that, unlike al-Quwayrī or Najīb Maḥfūz, for example, we find the structure of his narrative world to be episodic rather than organic. Often, the melodramatic element in his presentation of female characters renders his approach less objective and less satisfying than that of some other major Libyan writers.

Referring to the formal problems posed by al-Faqīh's art, the Libyan critic Amīn Māzin rightly says that al-Faqīh is hardly aware, in the collection *Al-Baḥr Lā Mā'a Fīh*, of the importance of literary form. He discusses the problem as follows:

The structure of all the stories does not indicate the existence of any short story at all. The action is devoid of any realism. The technique, if this is the right word, does not

1. Eliot, Selected Essays, London (1969), p.145.

indicate any development of the story. The action, in fact, does not exist; it is entirely illusory.⁽¹⁾

There are other stories by al-Faqīh which suffer from a serious lack of proper dialogue, as in Al-Kūsha (The Bakery)⁽²⁾, a story based largely upon the method of direct narrative. In fact, most stories in this collection suffer from this defect and it is this which, in fact, explains how al-Faqīh's work in journalism has indirectly deprived his work of the 'dramatic' qualities characteristic of great art.

In the collection of miscellaneous articles collected and published under the title Al-Sahrā' wa Ashjār al-Naft, al-Faqīh deals with various problems caused by obsolete customs, traditional ideas and beliefs that have been widespread in Libyan society for a long time. A number of articles are devoted to the feminist problem, stressing the importance of emancipation for Libyan women, the problem of the veil and of marriage customs. In this connection, al-Faqīh severely criticizes the traditional methods and

1. Amin Māzin, "Ra'y fī Majmū'at Al-Baḥr Lā Mā'a Fīh al-Ruwād, No.10, Tripoli, (October 1966).

2. Aḥmad Ibṛāhīm al-Faqīh, Al-Baḥr Lā Mā'a Fīh Al-Lajna al-Ulyā li al-Funūn wa al-Ādāb, Libya (1966), p.51.

أن يواجه تحديات العصر

How can a woman who lives in a state of isolation from the pulses of experience and the rhythm of life, who remains imprisoned for life in a cold, damp house, in the dark away from the light and the sunshine, and away from the spirit of the age - how can such a woman bring up children or run a household? How can a woman who never sees the light, who does not live her life, does not experience any intellectual currents and is not exposed to any real experiences or events outside her home, how can she be trusted to bring up a generation able to face the challenges of the age?⁽¹⁾

The immediate point at issue is that al-Faqīh belongs, in this passage, to a generation of Libyan thinkers who subscribe to this opinion, at least theoretically. The quotation given above is an example of al-Faqīh's occasional awareness of the real dimensions of the problem of female segregation. This well-defined approach to the dangers of such segregation is, of course, at the opposite pole from the abstract romantic approach to women as symbols of sex in his short stories. In fact, al-Faqīh exposes in his articles the harmful effects of misconceptions about the nature of women and their role, and the social consequences of women's exploitation by men in society. These consequences are important because they affect the structure of society as a whole. Referring to the problem of women's

1. Aḥmad Ibrāhīm al-Faqīh, Kalimāt min Laylā Sulaymān, Tripoli (1981), p.14.

emancipation, al-Faqīh writes:

فالقضية في رأى قضية مجتمع يتحرك في حركة واحدة
برجاله ونسائه ، ولان القضية بمثل ما تهم المرأة فهي
تهم الرجل أيضا ، فالمجتمع لا يكون مجتمعا إلا بالرجال
والنساء معا والامر ليس تملط فكر قديم مازال يعيش بيننا
وأن سلطانا تركيا قد تخلف عن عصره وبقي يعيش معنا
ارتدى ثيابا عصرية واختار له مخباء تحت منساض
المقاهى وخلف أعمدة الشوارع
وداخل دواليب الملابس .

The problem, in my opinion, is the problem of the whole of society: society moving in a certain direction, both men and women. The problem in question is of equal interest and importance to men and women. Society can only make progress through all of its members, of both sexes. The real point is not that man is dominating woman simply because he is man, but that we are still dominated by an obsolete way of thinking. It is as though a Turkish sultan, lagging behind the times, were still living among us, wearing a modern garb, hiding under cafe tables, behind the street pillars and inside the wardrobes.⁽¹⁾

It is noteworthy that most of the articles collected in *Kalimāt min Laylā Sulaymān* are devoted to the problem of women and their exploitation in traditional Libyan society. Among the issues raised by the writer is the conception of women as private property to be bought and sold, a conception which is responsible for women's alienation from

1. Ibid, p.150.

society and which men exploit by robbing women of any rights, especially with regard to marriage and emotional matters:

وقضية المرأة هي قضية انسان هذا الوطن
فلا شك أن ظل هذه المشكلة ينعكس على كل أوجه
الحياة الأخرى وتصبح قضية الرجل بقدر ما هي
قضية المرأة قضية الأطفال الذين سيكبرون
يوما ما وقضية المجتمع بكل فئاته وقطاعاته
قضية العمل والإنتاج والبناء .

The problem of women is the problem of man in this society, for the implications of this problem are considerably felt in all the other aspects of life. It also becomes the problem of men insofar as it affects the problem of bringing up children who will one day be fully-fledged citizens; insofar, that is, as it affects all the sectors and people of society. Ultimately, it is also the problem of work, production and formation of society.⁽¹⁾

It is clear from the outset that al-Faqih concentrates on social attitudes towards women but his diagnosis of this malaise lacks the socio-historical background which has determined and shaped the psychological basis of many human

1. Ibid, p.24.

relationships in developing literature. It is fair to stress the point that al-Faqīh brilliantly registers this important social phenomenon, but his approach is not as analytical as it might be from the historical point of view. Analysis of the problem from a real historical perspective is absent from his work. It is clear, for example, that the problem of divorce is the most serious factor responsible for the break-up of the family. Despite its importance, al-Faqīh does not deal with divorce either in his journalistic articles or in his short stories..

We are firmly convinced that Libyan women always feel threatened and upset by this problem. It is, in fact, a problem which makes women feel humiliated in society because the right to divorce can easily be exploited by men in Libyan society. Whereas women in the West do not feel so humiliated or helpless as in most countries of the Third World, women in Libya rightly feel that divorce, lack of work opportunities, and dependence upon men for day-to-day maintenance, as relics from the feudalist age, are among the factors which stand in the way of real progress and run counter even to the concept of human dignity insofar as Libyan women are concerned. Dehumanized by their dependence

and intellectual underdevelopment owing to the unavailability of real opportunities for the development of their intellectual faculties and their potential talent, Libyan women often feel that they are neither respected nor truly loved - except as objects of sexual desire.

In stating these facts, our purpose is to show their bearing upon the superstructure of ideas, beliefs and attitudes as reflected in al-Faqīh's treatment of women. The infrastructure in the Marxist sense,⁽¹⁾ with which we are not immediately concerned, was the feudal mode of production and the backward economic structure in Libya up to the late sixties. It is unfortunate that, in his articles, al-Faqīh does not tackle the problem of divorce. His interests do not go beyond the problem of the veil and the call for freer relations between men and women as a means of overcoming another problem - that of sexual repression. Despite these limitations, the tendency to call for the emancipation of women, though often expressed in general terms without going into concrete detail, is a step in the right direction from the theoretical standpoint. This step, however, is not taken in al-Faqīh's short stories

1. See Raymond Williams, Marxism and Literature, Oxford University Press (1977), pp.76-77.

and we rightly feel that this is due to his romantic approach, i.e. his over-emphasis on women as objects of sex.

Taking the foregoing into account, we can reasonably assume that the fictional world of al-Faqīh is a romantic one which, unlike his journalistic contributions, is not sufficiently realistic. His conception of women as being powerlessly shaped by external authority, represented by traditional and conventional attitudes, is far from being dramatic. It is for this reason that the relationship between the individual and society is based upon a reactionary attitude towards women as passive creatures who do not strive to change their situation. This conception, in turn, determines artistic form in al-Faqīh's writings, rendering it more mechanical, with no inner growth. The ideological content and the conception of aesthetic qualities as springing from a mechanical structure are connected one with the other. As we shall see, women in al-Faqīh's short stories are conceived as mere puppets, registering impressions from the external world and seeking no salvation. The sufferings of women, in short, could have been more convincingly objectified if al-Faqīh had adopted a more objective, more 'critical' approach to the problems he tackles.

Objectifying the experience in question means that al-Faqīh should have realized that it is the laws and conventions established in Libyan society which constitute the 'objective correlative', as it were, that has alienated women and deprived them of the right to live a dignified life. In the artistic world of al-Faqīh, as opposed to his prose writings, there is not enough recognition of women's right to education, to choose their husbands, to express feelings of love, or their desire to play a positive role in society. Instead of these positive possibilities, we encounter, in the majority of al-Faqīh's stories, only profuse feelings of romantic excess, not to say hallucinations, which are connected with his view of women as sex symbols.

There is a possible, historical explanation for this duality or cleavage in al-Faqīh, between the liberal approach to female emancipation in his prose writings and the reactionary conception of women as a symbol, or mere means, of sexual gratification. It is very likely that al-Faqīh found himself in a new situation as a writer after the 1969 Revolution. What is certain is that he benefited from the new climate of opinion provided by the Revolution in

Libya. It was this climate that deepened al-Faqīh's consciousness of the increasing importance of this problem. That is why he began to publish his articles in the Libyan press, which welcomed contributions from leading writers from all over the country.

Competition among Libyan writers trying to outbid one another in advocating progressive views about women and Libyan political problems in general has, in all likelihood, helped to propagate the mistaken view that al-Faqīh was influenced by the Egyptian socialist writer Yūsuf Idrīs. What is true is that there is no point of comparison between them in regard to technique or subject-matter. Idrīs reveals a more profound commitment to realism in a critical-socialist sense. There is, in al-Faqīh, a distorted vision of love in the short stories, coupled with an attempt to base social reform upon romantic and subjective solutions. Feelings of anxiety, fear and lack of mutual understanding dominate almost all love scenes or romantic situations, as in Safha min Kitāb al-Mawtā (A Page from the Book of the Dead)⁽¹⁾, Al-Qamar al-Aḥmar (The Red Moon)⁽²⁾, Irbiṭū

1. Aḥmad Ibrāhīm Al-Faqīh, Ikhtafat al-Nujūm, Al-Dār al-ʿArabiyya lil-Kitāb, Libya (1976), pp.14 ff.

2. Aḥmad Ibrāhīm Al-Faqīh, Irbiṭū Aḥzimat al-Maqāʿid, Dār al-Kitāb al-Lubnānī, (1967), pp.67 ff.

Aḥzimat al-Maqā'id⁽¹⁾ and Ahibbinī Hādhihi al-Layla (Love Me Tonight).⁽²⁾ In all these stories, as indeed in many others, love, as we shall see later, is conceived as a means of escape from the harsh realities of life. In this, al-Faqīh, no doubt, differs from the major realist writers in Libya and Egypt, including Yūsuf Idrīs.

This escapist tendency is due, among other things, to the fact that al-Faqīh's approach is not analytical enough. True, what characterizes the short story, as opposed to a prose tract or a scientific treatise, is not analysis but synthesis; however, what we mean is that al-Faqīh does not succeed in his attempt to synthesize discordant elements of the experience. This failure in synthesis implies that al-Faqīh does not penetrate the essence of phenomena. His fictional world is a world of impressions, both external and fleeting, that have not been deeply synthesized into great art. The result is that we are given, for example, the naturalistic background, such as public squares and streets in cities or villages, without interpreting their effect or significance vis-a-vis the life of the characters.

In an interesting article, Al-Fāris al-Jamīl al-ladhī

1. Ibid, pp.5 ff.

2. Ibid, pp.30 ff.

Dhahaba ilā al-ḥarb wa fī Yadihi Sayf min Khashab (The Handsome Cavalier Who Went to War with a Wooden Sword in his Hand), published in **Kalimāt min Laylā Sulaymān**,⁽¹⁾ al-Faqīh criticizes Libyan writers who try to defend the concept of women's liberation but who soon despair of achieving any success. These writers give up easily when they discover that tradition in Libya cannot easily be overcome. In the end, he says, they themselves accept the conventions of pre-arranged marriages. Referring to the writings of many authors on this important topic, such as Farīd Siyāla, °Abd al-Qādir Abū Harrūs, °Alī al-Miṣrātī, Khalīfa al-Tillīsī, Kāmil al-Maghūr, Yūsuf al-Dilansī and others, al-Faqīh wants to make the point that their works all defend the cause of women in Libya. The writers, however, could not maintain their campaign for very long.

There is, presumably, an implicit admission in al-Faqīh's writings on this problem that theoretical contributions and intellectual discussions may not be enough to change reality. Nevertheless, this admission does not prevent him from expressing himself in a conspicuously rhetorical style:

1. Aḥmad Ibrāhīm al-Faqīh, Kalimāt, pp.221-222.

follows:

عندما يحين الوقت لأن تكتب فتسجل
ليبية مذكراتها وتسجل بصراحة معاناتها
مع تقاليد هذا المجتمع .. وتسرد وقائع الصراع
الذي تخوضه كل يوم ضد العقلية القديمة ،
فلا شك أن دوراً بطولياً في هذه المذكرات سيكون
من نصيب طـ فـل الجـيـران "ب

When the time comes for the young Libyan woman to write her memoirs, recording in a frank way her suffering and struggle against the traditions of that society and the facts of her daily struggle against the old mentality, a heroic role will, without doubt, then be given in these memoirs to the child of the neighbourhood.⁽¹⁾

Among the interesting areas in which Libyan women play no positive role is the dramatic movement in Libya. With the spread of education in Libya, many people expected women to perform female roles as, for example, in school theatres. But these roles are still played by men.⁽²⁾ That is why al-Faqīh launches a serious campaign on behalf of women's participation in the literary and artistic life of the country.

1. Ibid, p.181.

2. Ibid, pp.185-186.

Problems of political and social consciousness, as al-Faqih conceives of them in relation to Libyan society, are vividly expressed in his comparatively recent book entitled **Al-Ṣaḥrā' wa Ashjār al-Naft** (The Desert and the Oil Trees).⁽¹⁾ The 'oil trees' of the title are a suggestive symbol of the new means of acquiring wealth through oil production in the desert. This newly-acquired wealth is rightly regarded by al-Faqih as a means of urban development, industrialization and socialization. By the latter term is meant socialist measures of transforming Libyan society.

This favourable trend of modern development is, unfortunately, accompanied, according to al-Faqih, by new problems which he discusses in some detail. Noting, apparently, the re-appearance of what he calls the commercial mentality of petit bourgeois sections in Libyan society, al-Faqih laments the fact that many citizens, in the early seventies, preferred free enterprise to public service or government jobs. Al-Faqih apparently condemns this tendency largely on the grounds that commercialism is incompatible with real culture.⁽²⁾

1. Aḥmad Ibrāhīm al-Faqih, Al-Ṣaḥrā' wa Ashjār al-Naft, Libya, (1979), pp.86-91.

2. Ibid, p.131.

The main point arising for discussion is that it is not clear whether al-Faqīh looks upon literature as a means of overcoming these destructive trends. Al-Faqīh does not discuss this important point, one which is a dominant theme of literary theory in Libya. What is certain, however, is that his short stories do not treat the same topics dealt with in **Al-Ṣaḥrā wa Ashjār al-Naft**. What he is really interested in is the sociological thesis that many Libyans still do not respect even the professional groups such as teachers or engineers, and others connected with public service. He certainly condemns the capitalist incentive which he refers to as "the glimmer of profit and wealth".⁽¹⁾ There is no doubt that, like many Libyan writers at the present time, he regards a positive contribution to Libyan society as more valuable than economic individualism under capitalism.⁽²⁾ It is understandable that he should also condemn what he refers to as the nascent capitalist class, composed, at this time, of oil "middlemen" who make large profits out of the oil business in Libya. Unfortunately,

1. Ibid, pp.90 ff.

2. Ibid.

the relationship between these "erroneous concepts" or values which he regards as a deviation from true socialism, and the function of literature in diffusing the new socialist values, remains vague in al-Faqīh's writings.

(B) Problems of The Portrayal of Women

In an important article published in his book entitled **Kalimāt min Laylā Sulaymān**, al-Faqīh denounces the feminist societies in Libya for their failure to make a positive contribution to social progress.⁽¹⁾ What is fundamentally wrong with his approach is that he ignores the fact that the feminist problem is not merely a social issue but also a political one. Al-Faqīh is, unfortunately, unaware of the fact that the failure of these societies is due to their lack of political action. The correct point of view that should be adopted and which also has a direct bearing upon our understanding of this phenomenon, as it is reflected in modern Libyan literature, is that the feminist problem is a socio-political one that is closely bound up with the historical development of Libyan culture. It is not merely

1. Aḥmad Ibrāhīm al-Faqīh, Kalimāt, p.119.

a social problem in the sense that the injustice, suffering and oppression inflicted on women, whether in the sphere of the family or at work in the fields, cannot be understood without referring to wrong judgements and misconceptions which have dominated Libyan society for a very long time.

It is in this sense that the problem of liberating women in society should be regarded as an all-embracing comprehensive process by which Libyan society, both male and female, should be freed from the impediments and obstacles which stand in the way of real progress in Libyan society. From the ideological point of view, the liberation of women in Libya should be considered an integral and inseparable part of the liberation of men, of all sectors in society. Al-Faqih is not aware of this important point because the articles he wrote on this subject concentrate on superficial aspects of this problem such as the veil or, understandably, on the right of women to receive an education. But his analysis fails to throw into bold relief the essence of the problem, namely the position of women vis-a-vis men, or the relations between the sexes in Libyan society. These relations are important because the family is a microcosm reflecting the macrocosm - Libyan society at large. In this microcosm, one of the main characteristics is that the man applies double standards in respect of his immediate family

and his life outside that family.⁽¹⁾ It is difficult to account for this duplicity from the intellectual point of view, despite the fact that it is directly reflected in a great many modern Libyan short stories. Many Libyans object to the liberation of women on the pretext of protecting honour (sharaf) and high ethical standards, while they are aware that ethical values are changing and that in their own private lives they do not apply the same standards and restrictions as they impose on their daughters or sisters. All aspects of sexual violation or deviation from ethical standards are hypocritically connived at or, at least, not openly discussed.

Both in his journalistic articles and in his short stories, women play an important part in al-Faqīh's writings at various levels and in various roles. He is conscious of the fact that these various roles are acted out in Libyan society during a transitional stage of development from feudalism to the industrial age. However, no positive values are stressed in connection with the roles themselves, whether Libyan women are portrayed as adolescent students, women in love, or traditional housewives. The fact that no

1. A good example of this duplicity is found in the character of Aḥmad Abd al-Jawād in N. Mahfūz's trilogy, which has puzzled many orientalists. See J. Jomier, Thulathiyat Nagīb Mahfūz, trans. N. Lūqā, Cairo, 1959.

positives are involved means, as we shall discuss later, that al-Faqīh's conception of Libyan women is a static conception which, in fact, runs counter to the rebellious, progressive element in the feminist movement in Libya. As a result, al-Faqīh is not fully aware of the need for salvation often felt by Libyan women in their struggle for liberation, contenting himself, as he does, with inadequate notions of romantic individualism. This is due to the fact that he is oblivious to the role played by class differences, local customs and traditional conceptions which are still prevalent in Libyan society today. This attitude, as we shall see, is conspicuously reflected in his short stories. It is based on the view that women are merely a means to a further end, a means of satisfying sexual needs or a symbol of love, betrayal or entertainment.

This criticism levelled against al-Faqīh's attitudes will be seen to be essential for understanding his literary output. Instead of committing himself to a positive attitude towards the struggle of Libyan women against obsolete values and outmoded ways of thinking which have been entrenched for many centuries, we find him following in the footsteps of other writers and traditional poets who regard women as inferior to men, as submissive creatures who owe their allegiance to the objective, impersonal authority of society, of the tribe, or of the husband. There is no

attempt to humanize the relations between the sexes. Concrete situations in his short stories will help us to understand al-Faqīh's attitudes.

In the title story from the collection entitled **Al-Baḥr Lā Mā'a Fīh**,⁽¹⁾ published in 1966, we find that the writer is attempting to embody, or give vent to, his strong romantic feelings by resorting to experiences with an imaginary Greek girl. On board a ship, the hero, a journalist by profession, is immediately attracted to this girl and imagines that she, herself, must feel the same way about him. Al-Faqīh then creates a barrier that hinders communication or understanding between the two. The barrier is a linguistic one: she only speaks Greek whereas the only foreign language he can speak is English, which he learned at school. There are strong hints that "conquest" is rendered difficult because of this barrier. The author resorts, in a typical romantic vein, to pretexts and excuses, both real and imagined, with a view to increasing emotional extravagance and comes out with a hackneyed theory:

لماذا هذه اللغات التي تنتصب كالأسوار
بين الناس . نحن نضعك بلغة واحدة ، ونفرض
بلغة واحدة ونحزن بلغة واحدة وأحد
ونحب بلغة واحدة لماذا لا نتكلم بلغة واحدة

1. Aḥmad Ibrāhīm al-Faqīh, Al-Baḥr Lā Mā'a Fīh , Tripoli (1966).

He can't believe that she is going to disembark here, that he will no longer see her and that her olive-coloured eyes will never again meet with his.⁽¹⁾

It is no exaggeration to say that no serious attempt is made by the writer to objectify the experience. Al-Faqīh wants to embody in artistic form an experience which takes place outside Libya, choosing as the heroine a Greek girl because such a choice would, it is implied, allow him to transcend the barriers and restrictions imposed by social customs in Libya. Unfortunately, this approach is tantamount to an escapist attitude towards the problem of frustration in the widest sense of the term, let alone in the sexual sphere. It is noteworthy that this escapism is due to the fact that the love stories are hardly credible; they lack what is sometimes referred to as verisimilitude - an air of plausibility or probability in the Aristotelian sense.⁽²⁾ That Libyan youths often, in the short stories of al-Faqīh, meet European girls and are all afforded the chance to indulge in day-dreams, illusions and fantasies which are far from realistic, offends against the commonly accepted canons of the traditions which derive from

1. Ibid., p.17.

2. S. Butcher, Aristotle's Theory of Poetry and Fine Art London (1951), p.55.

Aristotle as to the necessity of embodying "what may happen".⁽¹⁾

Al-Faqīh often mixes feelings of love with deprivation, mental anxiety and an acute sense of the meaninglessness of life in exaggerated contexts which, in many cases, are far from typical and cannot be described as universal. This means, as we have already implied, that the writer could not transcend his private, fantasizing world to reach the realm of objective truth. In his world, women are not only symbols of frustrated love but also a source of much psychological anxiety.

This approach to women may be illustrated by his short story Irbiṭū Aḥzimāt al-Maqāʿid (Fasten Seat Belts)⁽³⁾ in which the central male character leaves Libya to go on holiday abroad. Once aboard the plane, he chooses a seat next to a European girl so that he might seek an opportunity to talk to her. His one obsession is the magical accessibility of the European girl, using such terms as "electric charges" (shuḥnāt kahrabā'iyya) and other strange phrases such as "the cold blood in my veins" and

1. Ibid.

2. Aḥmad Ibrāhīm Al-Faqīh, Irbiṭū Aḥzimāt al-Maqāʿid, Dār al-Kitāb al-Lubnānī, (1968), pp.5 ff.

"monitoring" her movements and gestures. The girl, however, remains silent. Whenever he moves closer to her, she moves further away from him until she gets stuck in the corner. Sounds of "laughter" are then heard from the other passengers who are expressing their amusement at the unsuccessful amorous attempt and the inevitable sense of frustration and failure when it is announced that seat belts may now be unfastened. The young man says:

خلعت انا أيضا جاكيتي .. واقتربت قليلا من مقعدها
وحركت كتفي ليزحف حتى يخنق المسافة التي تفصل بيني وبينها
لاهل اليها والتحم بها واستمد من بدننها الطازج دفئا للدم
البارد في عروقي، حرمت علي ان تكون حركة عفوية
لاثر فيها للاصرار والترصد ولكي ازيد في التغطية
اشعلت سيجارة ونفخت نفسها طويلا وعندما حركت كتفي ليميل
اليها بداء وكأني اريد - فقط - ان اتبجح في الجلطة
وكدت اقترب من ذراعها .. لولا انها وبحركة واعية تعلملت
في مقعدها .. وابتعدت في آخر الكرسي وكأنها تريد ان
تمنحني الفرصة لارتاح في جسدي
كما اريد .

I, too, took off my jacket and drew closer to her seat. I moved my shoulder to be nearer to her so that I might bridge the gap or the distance separating her from me. I wanted to reach her, to join her, to derive from her 'fresh' body such warmth as would run through the cold blood in my veins. I moved, pretending that it was merely an involuntary movement and that there were no designs or plans on my part. In order to conceal further my real intentions, I lit a cigarette and inhaled deeply as I moved my shoulder to touch her. I might have touched her arm had she not, as though by a voluntary movement, nervously twitched in her seat. . . She became fidgety and moved to the furthest corner of

the seat, as though she politely wanted to give me the chance to feel as comfortable in my seat as I wanted.⁽¹⁾

One can, in fact, cite examples without end to demonstrate, on objective grounds, that emotional extravagance bordering on sentimentality and melodrama is characteristic of al-Faqīh's art. It is hardly necessary to point out that this sentimental, melodramatic element often destroys the integrity of the experience from the artistic point of view. It is responsible for his obsession with such problems as 'moments of conquest', erotic fantasies which may appeal to the instinctive reactions of the reader without, however, such moments being sanctioned in objective reality. In other words, al-Faqīh takes a 'short-cut', as it were, to the artistic effect which his stories are often intended to evoke, a short-cut that is made inevitable as a result of discounting essential elements in the various situations presented in his stories.⁽²⁾

The direct outcome of this sentimental approach is that al-Faqīh's portrayal of women is often one-sided and unconvincing. His women are empty, shadowy figures because

1. Ibid, p.7.

2. See J.C. Ransom, op.cit., p.51.

the approach in question tends to over-simplify the personality of the Libyan woman. In this connection, the Libyan scholar, Sulaymān Kishlāf rightly points out that what perniciously affects the art of al-Faqīh is that, among other things, he shows no interest in the psychological reactions of men or women in any humane situation.⁽¹⁾ Al-Faqīh is aware, of course, that women move about less freely than men in Libyan society because of the restrictions imposed on them. Al-Faqīh is more interested in the external behaviour of his characters than the effect on their psychological state produced by the social milieu.

Al-Faqīh's direct approach reveals itself, for example, in his neglect of what Kishlāf aptly calls the "barrier of suffocating terror"⁽²⁾ which segregates women and which precludes any real development of humane relations, and of the development and integration of the personality of the Libyan woman. In the short story Ahibbinī Hadhihi al-Layla (Love Me Tonight)⁽³⁾, an interesting situation arises when Sheikh Abdullah goes abroad for the first time as a

1. Sulaymān Kishlāf, Al-Ḥubb/Al-Mawt - Rajul wa Imra'a, Tripoli (1984), p.40.

2. Ibid, p.20.

3. Aḥmad Ibrāhīm Al-Faqīh, Ikhtafat al-Nujūm, p.30.

member of an official delegation. Leaving his colleagues at the hotel, he makes a stealthy visit to a night-club, determined to enjoy his newly-found liberty. The concept of social hypocrisy is exposed because al-Faqīh wants to show that, although this character is called 'Sheikh' ^cAbdullah, the title conferred upon him by the people of his village does not prevent his enjoying himself with a call-girl for one night.

Al-Faqīh, like the main character in this story, looks upon women as sex-objects. Women in his writings are incapable of developing any real relationship because they are reduced to mere sex symbols. Inside Libya, they are conventional creatures suffering from the fetters of reactionary traditions which arouse in them strong feelings of fear, anxiety and distress. As a result, love scenes are portrayed in some situations as fleeting or elusive experiences, or 'imagined' experiences behind windows and 'mashrabiyyas' (wooden oriels) which do not even reveal the face of the one looking out. In the short story Humūm Ṣaghīra (Small Worries)⁽¹⁾, we know nothing about the central female character except her name - Zahra. She is a

1. Aḥmad Ibrāhīm al-Faqīh, Al-Baḥr Lā Mā' Fīh, pp.

the impossible, in order to win the girl's love. However, no concrete details are given about the situation of the two would-be lovers. What colours their situation is an illusory atmosphere, or a series of illusions, which the writer seems to enjoy indulging in at the expense of aesthetic and moral integrity. By moral integrity is meant, in this literary context, the lack of a serious approach to the aesthetic treatment of the theme and to do it justice; al-Faqīh ignores what may be called the ethics of good writing. In short, he does not treat sex in his work as something deserving of serious treatment. As we shall see, it may well be that this lack of artistic integrity is an indirect outcome of al-Faqīh's work as a journalist, an effect of Libyan journalese on his technique as a writer.

Again, the negative attitude towards the male-female relationship is reflected in the short story Al-Kūsha (The Bakery).⁽¹⁾ This story recounts the problem met by Idhhayba, the pregnant wife, as a result of her husband's lethargy and nonchalance. The husband, a baker by trade, is so preoccupied with his work that he gives not a moment's thought to his wife's misery who also has the additional chore of preparing the dough for her husband. Al-Faqīh

1. Ibid, p.51.

leaves us in no doubt as to the husband's feelings of indifference when he returns home one day to find his wife confined to bed about to deliver a child at any moment; an old woman, acting as a midwife, is standing by her bedside. The husband, however, shows no concern or interest in the situation at all.

In the story Wafā' Bā'i^Cat al-Mā' (Wafā', the Water Vendor),⁽¹⁾ al-Faqīh clearly expresses the sense of alienation felt by Libyan women as a result of their emotional deprivation. Umm Su^Cayda is a poor woman who sells water to people living in decrepit housing firmly in need of repair. Her only son, Maṣṣūr, had been conscripted three years before and she often goes to the post-office in the hope of receiving a letter from him but to no avail. Then there is a sudden transition in the poor woman, from sanity to insanity, which brings about a change in people's attitude towards her for they now respect the woman and hold her in awe; women, children and even men visit her shabby home in search of her blessing. This change in attitude is apparently caused by the superstitious belief in the 'holiness' of madness. It occurs when the people of the

1. Ibid, p.63.

village discover the woman surrounded by a crowd of men and seemingly about to breathe her last. Again and again, in a hysterical manner, she repeats her wish to meet up with her son after her death.

There is much going on in this story and one finds that the writer's own personality overshadows that of all the characters. Consequently, the story fails to have a lasting impact upon the reader. All at once, the character of the woman becomes very pallid and weak; it lacks realism and is inconsistent with the events that take place. There is no obvious justification for her being taken with madness; she is a member of a village community and this form of society in Libya is noted for being very close-knit as if all members belonged to one and the same family. Her madness seems to be due primarily to the spiritual vacuum in which she lives - she feels alienated in her own society and it is this that is the real cause of the tragedy that befalls her, the sense of alienation that affects all women who have no man in their lives, be it father, husband or son. However, instead of analysing this problem and investigating the social forces and tribal environment that help to create the woman's psychological makeup, al-Faqīh allows himself to be diverted by secondary aspects. The story, all of a sudden,

is marked by artistic discrepancies and rapid transitions from one state to another in addition to illogical and unexpected turns of event. To study the female character from within necessitates the use of appropriate devices that help to link the internal world with the external, devices such as the monologue.

In the story entitled Sultāna (Sultāna)⁽¹⁾ al-Faqīh devotes a great deal of attention to the central male character, yet ignores the female character whom he shows, as with other stories, as suffering from a sense of inner defeat. This story concerns the feelings of anxiety and uncertainty that can result from excessive jealousy, and we can sense Sultāna's attempt to overcome the passiveness that is so characteristic of the Libyan woman. She is easy prey for the man's nagging doubts and fears but we remain ignorant of any concrete details concerning the story's characters. Al-Faqīh gives a brief description of the man:

ماذا حدث مساء أمس لسي خليل العجوز الذي
يرتدى عباءة شباء. ويتوكأ في مشيته على عكاز
من الخيزران ويأكل لقمة عيشه من قومه
للزجل. لم يعد خافيا على أحد من أهل البلدة.

What happened last night to Sī Khalīl, the old man who wears a gray mantle, supports himself upon

1. Ibid, p.75.

his bamboo staff when walking and makes a living from reciting the 'zajal', is no longer hidden from any person in the village.⁽¹⁾

One day, Sī Khalīl sees Sultana who is with a group of girls down by a stream and is taken with her beauty. Al-Faqīh introduces her involvement in the story to us with the following simple words:

هذه المرأة التي انتشلها من حياة بائسة
داخل كوخ لاتجد فيه الفراش ولا البطانية

This woman whom he has snatched and rescued from her wretched life, living in a hut without bed or blanket⁽²⁾

Sī Khalīl weds her but after a year of marriage jealousy begins to take a strong hold of his imagination. When he sees his wife wearing a new dress, he asks her how she obtained it. She answers that it was a gift from a relative but this fails to satisfy him. The situation worsens but the writer is unable to penetrate the wife's inner feelings or register her emotions in a way that is artistically and objectively convincing.

While the husband is in this doubting and suspicious frame of mind, he hears a whistle outside the house and

1. Aḥmad Ibrāhīm al-Faqīh, Al-Baḥr, p.75.

2. Ibid, p.79.

imagines it to be a man calling to his wife, a fact that seems to be confirmed when he hears small stones falling from the window. This serves to widen the gulf between the couple and the husband finally loses his self-control. He accuses her of being unfaithful and, after beating her, divorces her. The wife remains silent and prepares his tea in the usual way after the evening meal. Then, still in silence, she collects her few belongings and leaves the house to return to her father's hut. Not long afterwards, the husband discovers that a number of children had been playing outside the house and feels very guilty at the way he treated his wife. He tries to make her return home with him but her 'self-respect' refuses to let her go back and she prefers to stay where she is.

One of the most significant points being made in this story is the strictness of social and family traditions that grant complete authority to men and which women have to accept as a fact of life, as their inevitable fate. In his treatment of social phenomena, al-Faqīh uses an anecdotal style that is far-removed from artistic language. He does, however, get quite close to revealing the moral aspects he wishes to impart to the reader. When the wife emphasizes to her husband that the injury to her self-respect prevents her from returning, Sī Khalīl reminds her of the life of poverty

Amīn Māzin says of this point:

Despite the great flexibility and elegance of al-Faqih's style, graced as it is with a lilting poetic imagery, yet it can be criticised - particularly in his more successful stories such as "Sultāna" - by an overabundance of statements or propositional truths and a lack of appropriate dialogue that would reveal the inherent nature of the characters.⁽¹⁾

It is also noticeable in this story that al-Faqih lacks the required skill and experience to portray a woman's psyche, i.e. a description of the inner woman and the effect her husband's jealousy and way of thinking has upon her. The tendency to 'educate' the reader emanates from the writer's style and his own personal commentary that he incorporates within the story. He criticizes the inherited social traditions that have constrained woman's place in society and which have engendered personal psychological anxiety and frustration for her.

One cannot help but observe the attention that al-Faqih gives to the husband's feelings, particularly his jealousy and concern, but yet never mentions the age-gap between the husband and wife which must, of necessity, play a major role. In his introduction to **Al-Baḥr Lā Mā'a Fīh**, Kāmil Maḡhūr has this to say about the characters in al-Faqih's

1. Amīn Māzin, Ra'y, p.9.

stories:

Al-Faqīh does not exactly have an optimistic view of life. There is a veneer of sadness that covers his work as if he, personally, is of sad persuasion and has never known happiness. Pain is an old friend of al-Faqīh's and he tries to transfer his sadness to his reader but does so with an overly-pessimistic approach that leaves no room for hope at all. This veneer may very well be the remnant of a romantic tinge from which he could not free himself even while hoping to find a means of access to a better, new life in the city.⁽¹⁾

(C) A Critique of al-Faqīh's Literary Approach

It cannot be doubted that the writing of stories, as with the execution of other art forms, is tied to an observation of society's shortcomings and people's social and psychological problems. There are, of course, shortcomings in society that many are ignorant of, such as the alienation of women both within themselves and within society itself. The reason for treating these defects on an artistic level is to show people that the responsibility lies not with the individual but entirely at the door of society as, for example, with the estrangement of women. One of the most significant features of society's backwardness is that girls are looked upon as erroneous additions to family life, with

1. Kāmil Al-Maghūr, Introduction to Al-Baḥr Lā Mā'a Fīh

men taking the view that they are heavy burdens that have to be suffered until they can be married off, or even consigned to the coffin. Libyan writers must deal with these shameful attitudes in a much clearer and more profound way, their works emanating, as they must, from a social and literary consciousness that is more than adequate to tackle these issues on an artistic level. The exposure of these problems will lead to a gradual spread of awareness among people as to society's shortcomings, to the need for reform and to a spirit of cooperation in resolving the problem of women's status in the community. An erroneous concept that is dealt with by al-Faḡīh in Al-Qamar al-Aḥmar (The Red Moon)⁽¹⁾ is that of the need to "bury shame and dishonour". In this story, a young girl is murdered and her voice silenced; life in the village then continues as before as if nothing had happened. Essentially, the story concerns a village youth, Maṣṣūr, who is always one of the most active participants in celebrations that take place notwithstanding that he is only a shepherd boy who looks after the herds of village notables such as Sheikh 'Āmir, the headman. The girl in the story is Hind, one of the most beautiful girls in the village, with the longest and loveliest hair of any. She

1. Aḥmad Ibrāhīm Al-Faḡīh, Irbiṭū, p.67.

also happens to be the daughter of Sheikh Āmir. Whenever celebrations go on, Hind is there among all the girls, captivating everybody with her long, gorgeous hair. Manṣūr, himself, will be found singing to her, to the village and to the whole world, his tender songs having only to be heard once for them to be quickly taken up and sung by the whole village.

One day, Manṣūr meets Hind close by a stream. He approaches her and they instantly fall in love. However, she tells him to keep his distance in case anyone sees her. Manṣūr agrees to her request but he has fallen so much in love that his heart is beating wildly. Only the full, red moon hears his happiness and joy as it responds to Manṣūr's song about Hind. His love grows stronger and, in a rash moment, he expounds publicly how he feels towards Hind, singing about her lovely, black hair, her beauty, about his love, the moment when they met, and of the red moon that was out that night.

As quick as lightning, the song spreads through the village until everyone, women, children and even the old men, are singing it. Imagination runs riot and the villagers make something out of nothing: how Manṣūr was alone with Hind at night by the stream, how he embraced her and how "the wind, the trees and the plants hung towards the

ground in shame at seeing them together by the stream and how the water reflected their image".⁽¹⁾

Sheikh^ʿĀmir covers his head in shame from his fellow-villagers and it is evident that the dishonour which he believes has been visited upon him is throttling the Sheikh. One day, Hind disappears from the village and is obviously dead, though no-one knows the manner of her death. Manṣūr flees to the hills, wandering around hither and thither, midst mountain and valley, in a perpetual state of loss and despair.

The village is the bedrock of artistic experience with al-Faqīh, particularly in Al-Qamar al-Aḥmar, as he mixes prose-verse into the story and uses poetic language in order to convey the story's central theme, pouring out love and torment as he describes Manṣūr's feelings and emotions. Despite the beautiful, poetic spirit which al-Faqīh instils into the story, his image of Hind is a lacklustre one and fails to express adequately the struggle that exists between the individual and society. This represents al-Faqīh's artistic failing, visible in his ideational vacuum and lack of artistic maturity that leaves the central theme of the story hanging in the air. It is as if Hind's murder is

1. Aḥmad Ibrāhīm al-Faqīh, Irbiṭū, p.74.

something that holds no value. There is a clear tragedy in the life of Hind and Manṣūr but it is not described in a sufficiently profound manner; instead, the writer is content to mention the girl's death without highlighting the struggle that is going on between the individual and society. Al-Faqīh does not tackle the problems of class inspired by the relationship between Manṣūr, the village shepherd boy, and Hind, the daughter of the village sheikh, nor the problem of adhering to the tribal system, one that sticks rigidly to old-established social standards, albeit erroneous ones. Instead of this, al-Faqīh's treatment is nothing more than the story of Hind's murder and Manṣūr's flight. The death of Hind does not trouble the villagers in the least; on the contrary, her death is an atonement for the dishonour that befell the village due to Hind's assumed behaviour. In this and other stories dealing with the relationship between men and women, al-Faqīh still clings to the standards of rural life, albeit unconsciously, a factor that can be attributed to his upbringing in the countryside. He concentrates on the emotional angle more than that of class:

المبايا تنهدل شعورهن الغزيرة، مدهونة بالزيت ،
شعور سوداء تشم وتتألق وترقص، وهو دون كل
الشعور يعشق شعر هند فشعرها أغزر وأطول وأدكن
سواداً من شعور كل المبايا ..
وهو يضرب على الصندوق .. ليس ضرباً . ولكنه عزف

one's sex urge. It is this, the obeying of this need, that loses for Arab and Libyan citizens the greater part of their social and intellectual potential. When a man gets to possess a woman, he is unable to think logically about anything else.⁽¹⁾

The psychological and sexual frustrations that al-Faqīh spotlights and which result from women's isolation in Libyan society is reiterated in the character of ʿAbd al-Ḥafīz in the story entitled Ṣafḥa Min Kitāb al-Mawtā (Page From The Book Of The Dead)⁽²⁾. This man is a teacher in a school in an inner region of Libya who is taken with utter disbelief when he finds a girl studying alongside the boys in his class. He feels his imagination is playing tricks on him and, at first, believes the girl to be non-human, a visitor from another world. Nevertheless, he allows the girl to attend class when he discovers that her father has moved from the city to take up work in the country and there are, indeed, some positive aspects that result from the girl's presence, seen in the new concern the students have for their appearances and their studies. In this story, al-Faqīh is endeavouring to relay the true dimensions of female isolation but he does so in a greatly-exaggerated manner -

1. Sulaymān Kishlāf, Al-Baḥṭh fī Laḥzat Ḥanān Iʿnda Suqūṭ al-Iqnāʿa, Majallat al-Fuṣūl al-Arbaʿa (1975), p.77.

2. Aḥmad Ibrāhīm Al-Faqīh, Ikhtafat, pp.14 ff.

the students begin to imagine that she is a devil disguised as a girl. Nevertheless, exaggeration in this way does indicate the importance of this subject as far as al-Faqīh is concerned and may better explain the failure of novel values in establishing a more harmonious social relationship between the sexes. The teacher, who holds traditional views on women's place in society, becomes mentally disturbed and sexually frustrated over the girl's presence:

لقد تصور دائماً أن للبنات دروساً أخرى يجب أن يتعلمنها ،
على أيدي مدرسات من بنات جنسهن داخل مدارس خاصة بهن مدارس
لها بوابات حديدية كبيرة ولها أسوار عالية ولها تكتم
وسرية . وأن كل ما يقدم من دروس للأولاد شيء خاص بالرجال يجب
أن تستعى وتحتشم أي امرأة من الاستماع إليه ، لأن تخرج عن
كل أصول الأدب والحشمة وتجلس في تهتك وفجور ودونما خجل
أو حياء مع الأولاد وتستمع الى ما يستمعون اليه ، وتكتب ما
يكتبون وتمتحن فيما يمتحنون فيه ، وأن هذه البنت لابد
قد أخطأت طريقها ، أو تطلت الى المدرسة من الشباك ، وأنها
مدسوسة عليه دسماً ، وأنه لو سمع لنفسه أن يعاملها
كغيرها من الطلاب لكان في ذلك إثم .

He had always thought (imagined) that girls should be tutored differently by members of their own sex in special schools, ones with huge, iron gates, surrounded by high walls, secret and impenetrable. Moreover, that what was taught to boys was exclusively what men needed to know about and that any female would be embarrassed and shy to listen to such things; he never thought she could depart from all principles of decency and modesty and sit shamelessly with boys in the class, listening to and writing about the same things, and sitting the same examinations. This girl must have lost her way or slipped into school through the window in order to

plot against him in a deliberate intrigue - if he allowed himself to treat her in the same way as the other students, he would be committing a grave sin.⁽¹⁾

In this passage, the use of "shamelessly" to render the Arabic words "fī tahattuk wa fujūr" is admittedly inadequate; the Arabic words normally suggest profligacy, immorality and suchlike. This over-emphatic language indicates that al-Faqīh's concern is to reveal the immense psychological and social barriers that separate men and women in Libyan society. It is these barriers that generate far-reaching psychological effects and this is seen in the mental state of the teacher and in other stories in which women represent the central pivot around which the plot develops. This psychological imbalance causes the teacher to believe that the girl is part and parcel of a conspiracy that has been planned against him by the authorities, both inside and outside the school, because he finds it incredible that the administration would allow a girl to attend the boys' classes. The teacher says:

يعرف أن للمرأة حرمة يجب أن تصان وأن مكانها
داخل البيت بعيداً عن أعين الرجال، وأنه ماالتقى رجل
وامرأة الا وكان الشيطان ثالثهما، فما بالك إذا التقت
امرأة وثلاثون رجلاً، لا بل ألف رجل .

1. Ibid, p.17.

He knows a woman is inviolable and that her inviolability must be safeguarded, that her place is inside the home far away from the eyes of men, and that when a man and a woman meet there is always a third 'being' present - the Devil. What would one think if a woman were to meet thirty, or even a thousand men?⁽¹⁾

It is for this reason that the teacher, ^CAbd al-Ḥafīz imagines the girl to be a sorceress and that she has come from the world of jinns to turn the boys from scoundrels into peaceful students. When he corrects her work along with that of the boys, the idea of talismans and spectres as in the Ancient Egyptian Book of the Dead takes a hold on him. Al-Faqīh mentions this point more than once in order to emphasize the link that exists in the minds of many Libyan men between sorcery and otherworldliness and Libyan womenfolk, as if she is an alien creature completely different from normal human beings. The teacher imagines he has fallen in love with the girl who is surely young enough to be his daughter. What is curious here is that the author treats this mixture of reality and fantasy, the sorcery and influence of charms together with other ideas found in the Book of the Dead, quite seriously in that the teacher firmly believes that the extent of his feelings and emotions where

1. Ibid, p.19.

the girl is concerned have to be the work of a jinn or a magic spell. He begins to delve into old, yellowed volumes in the hope that he will find an antidote to counteract the effects of the spell that has been set upon him by the world of ghosts and dead people.

The main point of concern in this story is centred upon the teachers psychological attitudes more than anything else. Notwithstanding the fact that al-Faqīh has revealed the essential cause of the problem - the contradiction between old, traditional values and modern, social relationships, yet the teacher's character appears contrived and his emotional reaction excessive - this results in a story that is both intellectually and artistically superficial. Al-Faqīh uses symbolism in some stories but one cannot argue that he does so successfully. Perhaps he resorts to symbolism in order to criticize the constraints society imposes upon love and self-realization in one's emotions and romantic tendencies. In Qisṣatān Min ʿAnbar al-Atfāl (Two Tales From The Children's Ward),⁽¹⁾ a story also linked to the male-female relationship in society, the narrative of events is thought-provoking, fascinating and

1. Ibid, pp.67 ff.

characterized by a spirit of humour in al-Faqīh's portrayal of two babies, a boy and girl perhaps meant to represent 'Adam and Eve', who escape from hospital immediately after having been born, in an endeavour to realize the love that exists between them. It is apparent, from the outset, that al-Faqīh's intention is to criticize negative aspects of society such as the lack of social intercourse between the sexes, or the problem of women's isolation from men.

The boy gives himself the name Qays and his girl friend, the name Laylā. Some of the major obstacles that stand in the way of true love between people are pointed out when Laylā warns Qays that her family would not be an understanding one because their lives are steeped in ignorance, tribalism, the closed society, and traditional practices that lag centuries behind the modern age. Moreover, the two lovers are unable to find anywhere in Libyan society where they can be alone, where they can be themselves and perfect their love. They buy a paper to see what there is to do in the evening but, unfortunately, there exists no place for them to enjoy themselves innocently or where their love, virtuous as it is, would be accepted in public. On the contrary, Laylā is afraid when they sit down together in a coffee-house and the change in atmosphere is all too apparent. The customers are absolutely astonished

to see them because for the sexes to sit together like this is alien to Libyan society. They leave the coffee-house and go to the souk, often looked upon as a place of recreation in a city. They watch a play about love on a TV in the souk but this is followed by a religious programme that cautions against any form of social intercourse between the sexes; it calls for the isolation of women and warns of the problems that can arise when they mix in the same society as men.

What al-Faqīh is emphasizing here is that there exists no place for true love in Libyan society notwithstanding the positive aspects that can mark the Libyan woman as characterized in the baby girl. As there is nowhere for them to go, Qays and Laylā return to the hospital, shocked by society's denunciation of them and by society's traditional values which hinder the Libyan woman from achieving either self-realization or their ambitions in life. They are, furthermore, prevented from making a positive contribution to the society in which they live. Some of al-Faqīh's stories, as above, depend on a fantasy world, a world that cannot be seen or felt, inhabited, as it is, by apparitions. As we have said, fantasy is obviously a great stimulus to al-Faqīh in his writings for his departure from reality is quite marked.

One can safely say that al-Faqīh's stories are distinguished from those of other Libyan writers, with the exception of al-Quwayrī, by the rural or village atmosphere that he evokes; for him, the village is certainly not a trivial or passing affair but represents the real stuff of literary experience, closely identified, as it is, with the development of the Arabic story, particularly in the early fruits of romanticism which had an enormous impact in its portrayal of the local rural environment, turning it into a poetic image that served to celebrate love of the countryside. This impact, as pointed out by Dr. Muḥammad Hilāl Ghunaymī,⁽¹⁾ may be due to the fact that the romantic writers emphasized their deep attachment to the countryside and paid homage to their rural roots, drawing their characters from the peasantry, a class of people so often ignored in classical literature. Despite al-Faqīh's background imposing the hallmark of country and village life upon him, his close ties in that respect are not objectively reflected. It is for this reason that al-Faqīh fails to convey a moving, or artistically appealing picture of the various concerns of village life or to reveal the deeply-

1. Muḥammad Hilāl Ghunaymī, Al-Naqd al-Adabī al-Ḥadīth, Cairo (1964).

felt issues uppermost in the minds of villagers. Al-Faqīh does not underline the dialectical contradictions that affect the lives of these simple people in all dimensions, particularly the complex societal structure, whether from the social, economic or anthropological points of view; he also avoids tackling the effect that sudden change has had on rural areas in modern times.

Al-Faqīh gives brief insights into rural life together with an overview of certain customs and descriptions; no historical sense is felt of the village ethos in a changing world, nor are proper descriptive portraits given of the countryside. Al-Faqīh does not provide the reader with any kind of appealing folkloric image, unlike al-Quwayrī in his anthology of short stories entitled **Ḥayātuhum** (Their Life) in which, in view of al-Quwayrī's interest in critical realism and the condemnation of forms of social exploitation, one can truly feel the close ties with the earth and with the countryside and their influence upon the characters.

As for al-Fagīh, his attachment to a romantic style emanates from his own rural experiences. In some of his stories he has a tendency to depict aspects of the environment in addition to describing the sadness and

alienation from which his characters suffer. In general, it is to be noticed that his stories lack mention of the struggles, confusion and contradictions that mark society. He does not give concrete descriptions of his characters, nor of their circumstances and surroundings, nor of their innermost feelings. It is to be argued, therefore, that his stories lack the necessary structural and artistic elements as well as the effective technique required to synthesize the various elements properly and to provide for a clear and harmonious development of events. It is the life and personal experiences of the author that remain his preferred source of material. Having said this, the problem that faces any artist is to modify his personal experiences into objective experiences such that they express the spirit of the age, i.e. the issue of objectivity is such that different characters should be pictured in different ways and should not reflect the writer's own encounters and observations. This is what Eliot means when he writes that the great artist, in writing himself, writes his time.⁽¹⁾ One cannot say that al-Faqih leans towards objectivity in his writings or succeeds in objectifying his feelings since the way in which he portrays his characters affords no

1. Eliot, op.cit., p.137.

opportunity to the reader to become acquainted with those particular details and characteristics that would serve the artistic goal in a social or objective context. He conveys no external or internal features of his characters. If we look at his female characters in particular, they are nothing more than flat pallid shells and the reader can imagine them, inwardly or outwardly, as he wishes; al-Faḡīh fails to provide any basic details such as age and concrete features that generally set people apart. His dependence upon a romantic and illusory world has distanced him from social reality and, consequently, the situations in which his characters find themselves have no coherent or organic relationship between them, dictated, as they are, by his use of narration and direct statement. There is no sense, in some stories, of any organic connection between the events that take place - the writer depends upon coincidental happenings and a mechanical structure. His female characters are on the sidelines of life, living a routine and tragic existence. Contrarily, the short story writer al-Quwayrī is able to draw on important moments and sharply-focus them in relation to the lives of his characters, beginning, as he does, from the concept of oppression and alienation under both feudalism and capitalism. Thus does al-Quwayrī delineate his characters, characters who suffer

from frustration and mental rupture due to the fact that they are exploited economically and socially; they are characters broken in both body and spirit. It is facts such as these that render the experience the true raw material for artistic treatment.

While al-Quwayrī is interested in the innocent elements of young women, al-Faqīh pictures her as a mature person, being pursued by men both in the town and in the village. It is that that is uppermost in his mind: pursuing a woman and assaulting both her body and her dignity. In the context of love, she is no more than a mere sex object, left alone confused in a world of deprivation, loss and frustration. Whereas dialogue plays a fundamental role in al-Quwayrī's work (wherein he uses the Egyptian colloquial or Libyan dialects) and there is an absence of excessive romantic sentiment, for al-Faqīh dialogue serves his artistic objective but rarely - narration is the element with which he shapes his stories. This is due, in the first place, to al-Faqīh's work as a journalist, the diversity of his writing endeavours (daily articles and weekly chapters) and to his government job taking up most of his time. The central theme in his story Irbiṭū Aḥzimat al-Maqā'id (Fasten Seat Belts) expresses the feelings of anxiety, frustration

and failure felt by the youth Najmī in establishing relationships within society. It is noteworthy that the female character is a foreigner in view of the fact that al-Faqih is primarily concerned, not with objective reality, but with depicting a personal and psychological state. In fact, this story is a repetition of a theme in another story Al-Baḥr Lā Mā'a Fīh, both of them concerning Libyan youths who travel abroad and who undergo similar experiences. In Irbiṭū Aḥzimat al-Maqā'id, all that the youth can think of when he meets the European girl is the possibility of a new world of carnal desires! These are his thoughts:

انها مسافرة وحيدة، وانها جميلة، وانها بجواري على
المقعد وحركة صغيرة ولكمة صغيرة، ستفتح بيني وبينها
عالما جديداً. وسوف يجرى فيه دمي، واجد علاجاً لأمراضي
ونظرت باشتاء الى ذراعها الذي يسيل كنهر العسل
تفصل بيني وبينها مساحة صغيرة تزيد على
موضع اصابع اليد.

Travelling alone - she is very beautiful and sitting here next to me. One quick, little movement and I could open up a new world for her and me, a new world where I could become really alive and find solace. I gaze longingly at her arm which looks just like a river of honey. A small distance separates me from it, no more than a hand's width.⁽¹⁾

Al-Faqih manages to convey the impression that these moments in pursuing the girl are the most important in the

1. Aḥmad Ibrāhīm al-Faqih, Irbiṭū, p.6.

life of a certain class of Libyan going abroad, moments in which they could fulfill themselves. These desperate moments are pictured in all their detail and the action develops when the other passengers show their annoyance and disapproval of the young man's behaviour. Al-Faqīh is 'thereby attempting to link sexual feelings with the social order of things, the fact being that women are isolated beings in Libyan society, yet he does not tackle the essence of this social phenomenon by providing the necessary background that is tied to this situation. He links sexual feelings to the struggle of the individual against traditional standards - his choice of a 'romantic' situation is charged with personal impulses, all of which reflect individual anxiety without transcending it into a larger social context or indicating any possibility of social change.

The feeling of alienation from society suffered by the central male character in Ahibbinī Hādhihi al-Layla (Love Me Tonight)⁽¹⁾ means that he is afflicted by the social contradiction that exists between the reality of the inner person, on the one hand, and the external world, on the other. The man, Sheikh ʿAbdullah, is travelling on an

1. Aḥmad Ibrāhīm Al-Faqīh, Ikhtafat, pp.30 ff.

official mission to Europe for the first time in his life. At night, he goes to the hotel nightclub without telling his colleagues. His mental frustration becomes apparent when he realizes the truth about himself - forty years old and has never, in all his years, received one letter from a woman or had any member of the opposite sex feel affectionate towards him - and throws himself into the arms of the dancer on the nightclub floor. The sexual deprivation suffered by the individual is the dominant theme in all these stories but the manner in which al-Faqīh describes the social and psychological aspects in the stories ʿIrbīṭū Aḥzimat al-Maqāʿid, Al-Baḥr Lā Mā'a Fīh and Ahibbinī Hādhihi al-Layla lacks the objective and social correlative required to picture these situations properly. Al-Faqīh is conveying a didactic message - the absence of women in Libyan society. As a consequence, he records moments of utter deprivation on the part of his male characters. The artistic balance between form and content is upset as a result of exaggeration and direct statement; furthermore, the author himself intervenes in the storyline. All of these factors hinder the organic development of the events and the required balance in describing the male-female relationship is not to be found. As in the story

stream-of-consciousness technique on a superior artistic level - this results from the writer's persistent intervention in the action and his poor sense of artistic structure. Al-Faqīh is endeavouring to picture the atmosphere, full of bitterness and frustration, that prevails over the old man, especially in his description of the Sheikh when he is in the nightclub listening to the hubbub of the drums:

ألا ينتهى هذا الطبل اللعين ويصمت الى الأبد . لكن
الطبل لا يتوقف انه يمضي متدفقا ، يسرع في الايقاع
ويبطي مرة أخرى ، يثور أحيانا ويهدأ أحيانا أخرى
وهو معه يصعد ويهبط ، يقذف به الطبل حتى يخترق
السقف ويرمي به أشلاء فوق الأرض ، حاول أن يغمض
عينيه كي لا يراه ويمد أنفيه كي لا يسمعه ، لكن
الايقاع يقتحم عليه كل كيانه ويشير بداخله أمواجاً
من العذاب الذي لا حـدد
لـه .

Would this abominable drumming ever cease and remain silent forever? But the drum did not let up and carried on exuberantly, the rhythm speeding up once more, now erupting, now calming down. He felt himself rising and falling with it, as if the drum was throwing him up to the ceiling and dashing him down to the floor like a corpse. He tried to close his eyes so as not to see it, to block his ears so as not to hear it. But the rhythm bore down on him, rousing waves of never-ending torture within him.⁽¹⁾

This image sets out the similarity that exists between

1. Ibid, p.42.

the man and the drum, both of them hollow and vacuous. For Sheikh ʿAbdullah represents the social values, delusive and false, that he has lived up to these past forty years among the people of his village. In one moment, everything is laid bare, everything has turned into a hollow vacuum that is no different from the drum, particularly when the sheikh throws himself in front of the dancer, breaking down and asking her to love him just that one night. It is an outburst that reflects the man's self-alienation and frustration. One should note that the factor of coincidence plays a major role in al-Faqīh's stories - people meet, love and part all by chance, i.e. the story rests on a weak justificatory and analytical foundation and this means that the writer has to rely more on narration and the inclusion of exciting moments than on artistic structure. Most of the time, al-Faqīh is recording a particular character's reaction to certain unexpected events and justifies this as the logic of fate. This is seen in the story Al-Baḥr Lā Mā'a Fīh where al-Faqīh makes language the main barrier between the man and the woman, as if it was something that fate had willed. Why does the woman not speak the same language as the man? The author uses stratagem when he creates a language of the eyes and of music, endeavouring to do away with geographical boundaries so as to emphasize that

a chance love is far more important than any other factor. As we have seen, in Ahibbinī Hādhihi al-Layla, when the Sheikh goes to the nightclub he discovers that all those present are couples enjoying themselves. He remains alone and the reader can sense his strange feeling of alienation. The critic, Sulaymān Kishlāf has this to say about the writings of al-Faqīh:

Due to the non-existence of any harmonious relationship between the two extremes - 'men and women in Libya' - and, as a result of the comparative freedom of movement and action that the Libyan male enjoys, this writer, instead of looking inwards and helping to demolish the suffocating and deadly barrier that inhibits human relationships, turns, instead, outwards, in the first place, so as to escape any confrontation and, in the second place, imagining that he will thus be able to attain his objective with ease.⁽¹⁾

Chance occurrence and affectation also play significant roles in other stories such as Humūm Saghīra (Minor Worries) in which the writer's objective is to picture the human soul and its alienation. The story is told in an affected and contrived style. The son rebels against his father's wish that he marry his cousin. Under normal circumstances, it is not the Libyan custom to expel a son from the home, nor is it possible for a son to lead a full independent life away

1. Sulaymān al-Kishlāf, Al-Baḥṭh, pp.82-83.

from his family resulting from his infatuation over a female neighbour whom he has been observing from his window. In other words, the concept of independence is governed by complex factors related to the manner of the child's upbringing in the society and the emotional ties that bind the son to his family, factors that are very strong in Libyan society. One could argue that this story is a journalistic treatment of a social issue. However, the weak artistic framework in which the story resides fails to arouse our self-involvement in the events depicted and the atmosphere of the story completely bypasses us.

In Al-Ayyām al-Thalātha (The Three Days),⁽¹⁾ the longest story in the collection Irbiṭū Aḥzimat al-Maqāʿid, al-Faqīh does, in fact, fall into a deep chasm of direct statement and narrative, turning the story into a long anecdotal series of episodes that relay the story of a North African youth's infatuation with an Egyptian girl who, as a trainee-member of a group of social workers, has been despatched to an Egyptian village. Over a period of two to three days, the infatuation develops and his feelings for the girl intensify. She then returns to her work in Cairo and the

1. Aḥmad Ibrāhīm Al-Faqīh, Irbiṭū, pp.89 ff.

boy is left in a state of psychological ruin and despair. This is a reiteration of the male characters depicted in the stories Irbitū Ahzima Maqā'id and Al-Baḥr Lā Mā'a Fīh - they also, to all intents and purposes, express the personal experiences of the author. The story, written in direct narrative and containing commentary and non-functional intervention on the part of the author, suffers from an affected and verbose style that loses the moment, allowing it to founder in a temporal and spatial labyrinth. It is also filled with secondary characters, a factor that brings about the story's failure. The verbosity detracts from the effectiveness of his style when he conveys to the reader the feelings of the youth when in the car with the girl sitting beside him:

وبشير مازال ملتصقاً في جلسته بالفتاة . وكان في
مظهره الخارجي يبدو موعداً وقوراً ، هادئاً ، لا غبار عليه
ولكن في داخله لم يكن أبداً موعداً وقوراً أو خالياً من
الغبار كان في داخله مهرباً ، معربداً ، بل أن ثمة مهرجان
في قلبه مهرجان صاخب هائل ، أنه ليشعر الآن في هذه اللحظة
وكأن ثمة ستارة داخل قلبه ترتفع تدريجياً لتظهر من
خلفها أوركسترا بطقم من الموسيقيين .. عازفي الكمان والعود
والقانون والبيان والناي وضابط الايقاع
وضارب الدف .
وكان ثمة صوت على مسرح قلبه ينطلق صائحاً قبيحاً
ونزق لا حدود له .

Bashir was still in his seat clinging to the girl. Outwardly, he appeared well-mannered and

dignified, calm and impeccably behaved. Inwardly, however, he felt none of this - he felt excited and greatly aroused. Indeed, there was a huge carnival, loud and boisterous, going on inside him. He felt, at this moment, that a curtain was rising gradually in front of his heart to reveal an orchestra with a full complement of musicians . . . there was the fiddle, oud, qanoun, piano, bamboo flute, drums and tambourine. A voice on his heart's stage began to sing out, vociferous and unrestrained.⁽¹⁾

It is noticeable with al-Faqih, then, that some stories are similar as regards the form in which he presents the theme. He resorts to narrative and statement and, so doing, reveals a lack of awareness of his characters as well as knowledge of the causes and consequences of using such an affected mode of expression. As regards content, most of his male characters suffer from an absence of women in their lives. Another reason for the failure of the abovementioned story is the flatness and monotony of the subject-matter. The story covers twelve pages and no details are given of any of the female characters' features.

In Jur^Cat Mā' (A Gulp of Water),⁽¹⁾ the author once again makes use of the episodic mode and verbosity that fail to assist the natural development of the story. The central male character meets a man in the desert, takes pity on him and offers him some water. He feels a certain liking for

1. Ibid, p.96.

2. Ibid, pp.31 ff.

the man and, through their conversation, discovers that the man is not affiliated to any particular region. Here, al-Faqih is arbitrarily highlighting the geographical factor in people's appreciation or view of others: a person from Benghazi is called "Sharqāwī" (Easterner) while from Tripoli he is called "Gharbāwī" (Westerner). This stranger has clearly revealed, in fact, that he is an outsider, a Sharqāwī. At the end of the story, the central character finds out that the man is a bandit but al-Faqih makes it plain that his attitude towards him in no way changes and that he remains affectionate and friendly towards him. The dialogue, however, does not serve any purpose because it is too long. There is, of course, no harm for any writer who has a design upon the reader to attempt to objectify situations in order to reduce traditional tribalism, parochialism or separatist attitudes in a small country. No one denies that the attempt to cling to local 'Aṣabiyya (group solidarity) as a means of self-betterment runs counter to the Zeitgeist, indeed to the modern consciousness, both literary and social, in modern Libya. The point at issue, however, is that tendentious statements or situations are used to convey directly to the reader the view that there should be no distinction or hatred between the Sharqāwī and the Gharbāwī. The indirect method is far

more convincing from the artistic point of view.

The story Wafā' Bā'a^ct al-Mā' (Wafā', the Water Vendor)⁽¹⁾ centres on the relationship between the main female character, Wafā', and the environment in which she lives, is suffering the pangs of the real world. It gets to the point where she becomes deranged as a result of the utter misery she feels at not having her only son around - he is serving as a soldier in the Libyan army. Three years go by but still he has not returned and she finally loses patience with her suffering and the abuse that is hurled upon her by society. In return for a pittance, the woman fetches water for people but has to forever endure their curses and abusive manners. However, she is late one day and fails to bring any water. She has turned mad and news of this quickly spreads among the people. They change their view of her and she becomes highly respected and held in awe as everyone visits her seeking her blessing and supplication. Her condition is such that her departure from this life is considered imminent and the name of her son, Mansūr, is forever on her lips.

Al-Faqīh, in this story, fails to express adequately the change that has come over the old woman. For example, it

1. Aḥmad Ibrāhīm Al-Faqīh, Al-Baḥr Lā Mā'a Fīh , pp.63 ff.

happens suddenly and does not arise out of the organic development of events; the writer simply does not prepare the way for this change. As with other characters of al-Faqih, one can feel time passing but not the temporal effect on the characters or the action. For instance, people suddenly begin searching everywhere for the woman who has disappeared. They find her, seemingly on the point of death calling out the name of her son. She is taken mad, uttering strange things that no-one can understand. From that moment, people look upon her as a pious woman and no longer the poor creature they had been abusing only shortly before. However, al-Faqih does not have the ability to reach into the psychological depths of the old woman. She is falling apart mentally, firstly because of her son's absence, secondly because of the harsh treatment she receives at everyone's hands. The change that befalls the woman is not examined thoroughly enough and no justification is shown for the new attitude of the people towards her, a woman who has gone mad and whom they now consider as a "holy woman".⁽¹⁾

What is noticeable in this story is the lack of concern on the part of the community for the woman's suffering and loneliness - she has lost her only family, her son. It

1. Ibid, p.69.

might be truer to say that the woman's suffering is more a direct result of her alienation in society through the lack of a man in her life; it is here that al-Faqīh is highlighting just how important a man is in a woman's life, whether husband or son. This old woman is awaiting the return of her son whose presence in the village is required in order that she might regain the respect due to her. Al-Faqīh does tend to exaggerate, however, the cruel treatment meted out to the woman by her fellow-villagers for people in village and rural society usually live together as one closely-knit family. Furthermore, the reason the author gives for the tragedy that befalls this woman is not at all convincing; the three-year absence of her son does not mean that he will not return - it is, in fact, a relatively short period that would certainly not cause the woman to become mentally deranged. The point that al-Faqīh is trying to make is that women suffer alienation in society, a society that refuses to allow a woman to live alone as a self-reliant being. This is a level of thinking that, arising out of a backward and undeveloped lifestyle, can occur in an urban society because such a society is heterogeneous; it would not, however, be seen in homogeneous village society.

This story also deals with the issue of people's

readiness to believe in the supernatural and give in blindly to "sha^Cwadhā", an Arabic word that covers magic rituals, shamanism and a magical conception of nature. This would be more credulous if it were depicted as occurring in an urban society which tends to experience great, sudden social changes, good and evil, and women do often find themselves alienated in such society. It is rare for Libyans to devote themselves to these practices in village society because rural life is marked by social cohesion. If interest in superstition and otherworldliness exists it normally takes the form of visiting holy men, sites of tombs and other religious places: these are traditional factors long-accepted in village life.

From the point of view of reality and its negative aspects which al-Faqīh is endeavouring to highlight, it must be said that he even adopts an erroneous concept as his point of departure on which to build the story - the excessive attachment of the mother to her son and her objection to him joining the army. The real situation in Libya is other than this, particularly in the case of poor people for whom their son's enlistment in the forces is a time for rejoicing and for pride. In fact, the parents often encourage their sons to enlist. Al-Faqīh is, moreover, overwhelmingly concerned with the misery suffered

by the mother and describes her feelings and longing for her son in narrative form without, however, concretely attributing such feelings to her alienation which is due, in fact, to the absence of a man in her life, and not necessarily to the three-years absence of her son.

In Dhāta Layla Ibrīliyya Rā'i^ca (Once Upon A Marvellous April Night)⁽¹⁾, the story takes the form of a love-letter written by a young man as if he is talking to his loved one and telling her of his dreams. He is a romantic who expresses his feelings in poetic form and is often swept away by his imagination into an adolescent dream-world wherein he searches for the perfect love; yet the love that he searches for is too ethereal to exist or be possible in the real world, away from that of dreams. The entire story is nothing more than the romantic meditations of the youth made one night in spring, a night that reminds him of a loved one and how beautiful was the feeling of love itself as he compares his sweetheart to the moon. The story lacks tension and dramatic depth because it is recorded through the feelings of the youth, a very lack-lustre character indeed. None of his feelings or romantic attachments reach

1. Ibid, pp.155 ff.

through to us. All the elements in this story are weak and the romantic feelings of the youth are brought out only superficially. There is absolutely no plot as such, the narrative style being sufficient only to describe the external appearance of the character. No attempt is made to spotlight any psychological traits or the suffering the youth is made to bear in the real world and which moves him always to seek love and romantic refuge in his dreams. In his criticism of this story, Amīn Māzin says:

Here is another story in which the form is practically non-existent and in no way suggests a story. The plot is unreal and has no presentation. I would not hesitate to say that there is absolutely nothing happening at all. The entire thing is an illusion right through to the end and I have no hesitation in saying that if it were not for the book's title informing me that it was an anthology of short stories, I would never have considered "Dhāta Layla Ibrīliyya Rā'i^Ca" to be a story.⁽¹⁾

The issue of superstition, charms and talismans is reiterated in the story Ṣafha Min Kitāb al-Mawtā⁽²⁾ drawing its inspiration this time from the Book of the Dead of the Ancient Egyptians. This is given expression when the teacher in the story, ^CAbd al-Ḥafīz, is convinced that his feelings towards the one girl student in his class in the

1. Amīn Māzin, Ra'y, p.13.

2. Aḥmad Ibrāhīm Al-Faqīh, Ikhtafat, pp.14 ff.

rural school where he teaches are the work of sorcerers and jinns and perhaps someone has cast a magic spell on him in his house. He starts searching in old, faded books in the hope of discovering an antidote to the spell. It is a simple story, the gist being that a city girl whose father has moved to another place of work in the country is permitted by the education authorities to enrol in a secondary boys' school to complete her education. It is convincing to a certain extent, the main thread being the wide gulf between urban and rural life, and the isolation of the female sex from public life. It is the teacher's considered opinion that women should remain secluded in the home and that girls' education must be confined to a special school for their own sex surrounded by high walls.

The girl cannot lead a life of her own but is always regarded as a simple shadow of man. Al-Faqīh, in observing the teacher's feelings, is concerned not only with his outward manifestation of love but also with his inner sentiments. For the teacher, the girl's presence in the classroom is like a hallucination, to such an extent that he believes her to be a devil who has taken on the form of a young girl. The flaw here is that al-Faqīh exaggerates his description of the teacher's reaction when the girl begins to invade his private life, so much so that if she were late

in the morning, he would begin worrying unnecessarily. She dominates his entire thinking, inside or outside the school and even in his own home when he is marking her work. In view of the fact that the story is written on a single level - that of the narrative - the lack of organic unity is evident. Al-Faqīh deals with certain events but fails to invest them with an artistic treatment that would help to develop the story, e.g. the situation in which a change takes place in the classroom and the positive effect the girl's presence has on her classmates. The writer does not use elements such as these in order to develop the story and the action in a harmonious way. No concrete details or information are given about the girl, there being an over-concentration of the character of the teacher because of al-Faqīh's main concern, as with the majority of his stories, of tackling frustrated feelings of love as well as the frustrations and hallucinations suffered by men. Al-Faqīh's problem is that he over-indulges in lengthy argumentation that tends to distract the reader who is trying to follow the thread of the story in order to understand the essential issue at stake. Never do we find a convincing solution, however. Muḥyī al-Dīn Subḥī criticizes the collection *Ikhtafat al-Nujūm* in these words:

Aḥmad Ibrāhīm al-Faḳīh's story characters, without exception, suffer from one delusion, one that is characterised by its power to invest their lives with misery with no semblance of happiness, unable to envision a world truly worth living in. The ability to invoke a better life, in al-Faḳīh's stories, only occurs in special contexts such as drunkenness, or an external stimulus which, in the main, is provided by the presence of a woman.⁽¹⁾

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1. Muḥyī al-Dīn Subḥī, "Ikhtafat al-Nujūm", al-Fuṣūl al-Arbaʿa, No.7, (1979), p.148.

CHAPTER III

KĀMIL AL-MAQHŪR

(A) Introducing al-Maḡhūr

Kāmil al-Maḡhūr, a member of the '50s generation, grew up during a period noted for romantic trends in literature. Nevertheless, his work carries the stamp of reality and of historical influence, promoting, as it does, revolutionary and radical changes in the social structure. He is the most skilful of Libyan authors, save for ^CAbdullah al-Quwayrī, in his handling of the art form in literature and knows exactly when to choose and incorporate in his stories those suitably-charged moments that are of such tremendous importance in man's life. Consequently, al-Maḡhūr is able to use the artistic devices at his disposal in order to create a dialogue and to press home the significance of the events and experiences which he writes about in his stories. This he can do because of his close contact, as a lawyer, with different classes in society and association with many social groups, seeing people's problems from close up. Thus, he acquired immense experience through his direct exposure

to the problems and issues that exist in society. His stories come as close as possible to historical reality, reflecting his impressions of social injustice during the 1950s and tackling all aspects of life with particular attention to those situations that serve to highlight the unfortunate circumstances that have beset the Libyan people since the late '50s.

Al-Maghūr is one of the Libyan writers who received his education in Egypt, graduating from the Faculty of Law, Cairo University. He lived in that country during the period of the intense literary and critical activity that marked the 1950s in Egypt. It was at that time that critics in Egypt were concerning themselves with the various theories pertaining to the relationship between literature and social reality.⁽¹⁾ There can be no doubt that al-Maghūr was influenced by the ideas of Rashād Rushdī, Louis ^CAwad and Muḥammad Mandūr. It was in 1956 that al-Maghūr began to write short stories and al-Milād (The Birth) was published by the celebrated critic Maḥmūd Amīn al-^CĀlim in his journal, al-Masā. At the same time, al-Maghūr sent some of his stories to the newspaper Ṭarābulus al-Gharb in Tripoli which published certain of them. Following his graduation,

1. Maḥmūd Taymūr, Al-Adab al-Hādif, Cairo (1959), pp.33 ff.

al-Maghūr returned to his native land to practise law.

Al-Maghūr is regarded as a Libyan writer who is completely honest with himself. His stories do not arise out of his imagination alone so that they are devoid of all personal suffering. Rather, they result from his own experiences and are told with integrity and sincerity, relaying his feelings as to the suffering and anguish experienced by the working class. In the same way, he extends a sympathetic attitude to the situation and circumstances of working people from the social, political and economic points of view. In addition, he conveys the ignorance and poverty of the people, their subjugation under the monarchist regime and the intervention of the Italian colonialists in the political affairs of the country.

A cloud of pessimism hangs over al-Maghūr in his belief that the Libyan people would find it difficult indeed to achieve social justice and to free themselves from repression and domination. Due to such external and internal influences, his writing gives a clear indication of the political goings-on in history that have been characteristic of Libyan life. That is one part. He then builds his stories upon a foundation of objective truths and minute observations and fuses that with his fertile imagination. In this way, the characters in al-Maghūr's

stories bear the imprint of the Libyan environment, its dialect, its language and its contrasts and he uses other literary devices to picture their dreams and ambitions while they struggle on, leading anxious and troubled lives. Al-Maqhūr associates himself with his characters, with all aspects of their day-to-day lives and his writing is a true representation of the feelings of these people, free, most of the time, of the exaggeration that typifies many of the stories written by Libyans during the same period.

Two anthologies of al-Maqhūr's work have been published, the first being **14 Qiṣṣa Min Madīnatī** (14 Stories From My Home Town) in 1965, the second **Al-Ams al-Mashnūq** (The Hung Yesterday), in 1968. Al-Maqhūr's cultural background is a varied one indeed: he went to school in Libya and then went to Egypt to enrol in the University of Cairo. Following his studies there, he returned to Libya and later went to France to complete his higher education. It is true to say, therefore, that al-Maqhūr's political awareness stems from a long period of exposure to a varied culture and his own personal experience of and feelings towards events and happenings in society.

(B) A Static Conception of the Status of Women

Al-Maqhūr, in his anthology **14 Qiṣṣa Min Madīnatī** is

intent on adopting a psychological approach in his description of the stories' characters and thus, in the majority of the stories, he highlights different psychological factors and stimuli. He is trying to unlock the secrets of the mind, the conflicts, feelings and contradictions that exist and, it must be said, he achieves noticeable success in showing these aspects of human behaviour in his work. The artistic technique he uses is intended to create a clear artistic effect upon the reader: to make us sympathise with his characters and to be concerned about what happens to them. This creates a bond between the reader and the central characters, a bond and an empathy that develops by way of suggestion, not by sermonizing. The strong bond that exists between the author himself and the characters is also evident. Al-Maghūr spoke on this in a speech he gave during a conference of North African writers in January, 1969:

I must tell you that my own involvement with the story was not with the short story as such. Neither was it with a pure form of art, or to pursue a particular form of art as a professional, or to practise such. It was, and, perhaps, still is, with the pain and suffering of mankind.⁽¹⁾

1. Kāmil al-Maghūr, "Qaḍāyā al-Khalq al-Qaṣaṣī fī Muġtam-a^Cātina al-Sā'ira fī Tarīq al-Numuww", Majallat Libya al-Hadītha, No.21, p.26, Tripoli, (1969)

At the same time, this artistic objective of his sheds light on the background to the economic, social and political circumstances that prevailed in Libya during the 1950s and 1960s, a background that is tied to a marked social and cultural backwardness. His stories find the characters suffering the pain of life and the oppression that comes with exploitation. In al-Maghūr's eyes, the story is not a work of art in or for itself but a means by which people of many social groups may be liberated from social and economic exploitation. In Al-Kúra (The Ball)⁽¹⁾ from **14 Qiṣṣa Min Madīnatī**, the writer clearly concentrates on the psychological state of the central female character, presenting her in the light of the social environment in which the story's events take place. She is a prostitute but al-Maghūr does not concentrate so much on the kind of work she does but on exposing the reasons and motives that made her take it up. More than anything else, she has done so for financial reasons. The writer, therefore, does not overly-defend the 'heroine' as is customary in stories of a traditional kind. Instead, he centres upon the harsh reaction of her neighbours and their unsparing treatment of

1. Kāmil al-Maghūr, 14 Qiṣṣa Min Madīnatī, Tripoli (1978), 2nd. ed., pp.31 ff.

her son with whom the children in the street refuse to play. Al-Maghūr describes the character and inner personality of the boy through his actions and behaviour. For example, he pictures the child's feelings as he is watching the other children play ball while they have refused to allow him to join in. In his description of the action in this story, al-Maghūr draws on the social reality in which the characters live and which is common to them all. Sympathy is evoked in the meeting between the mother and her child, a meeting that certainly evidences the compassion felt by the writer for the woman as well as his criticism of the social and economic circumstances that, most of the time, cause women to deviate from the right path.

Al-Maghūr takes a strong interest in the strong and affectionate ties that bind the mother and child on the one hand, and the relationship between the boy and the children in the street and the bad way they treat him, on the other. The child asks his mother if he can live with her instead of where he is now, with his grandmother in another part of the city, the 'medina', because he so hates to hear the terrible things that are always being said about his mother, not only by the children, but by other people in the street - everyone keeps accusing her of being an immoral and corrupt

person. The story concludes with the mother being arrested. Al-Maghūr tackles this very human, very real story in a beautiful and artistic way that brings home to the reader the reality of the social context as the writer describes how poverty can drive a woman to lose her honour in order to live. This is so evident in the woman's words when she says to her son that she is carrying out

خدمة تجيب فلوس .. ياسر من أيام الهم ..
قولي وين تبي الحوش ..! ويعيش معها أسعد لحظات حياته
يحلم بالسكن الجديد .. ويلون لها الحجرات ويبتسم وهي تصف
الاشياء التي سيملكها .. والملابس .. واللعب .. والكرة التي
لم يشاهدها أبداً صغار الحى.

a service which procures money; I have had enough of the hard times and the worry. Tell me where you would like to have the house." He would live with her the happiest moments of his life, dreaming of the new domicile. He would decorate the rooms for her, and he smiles as she describes the things he will get . . . the clothes, the playing about, and the (precious) ball, never seen by the boys of the district.⁽¹⁾

This and other stories are written as an indictment of social and political life , but the indictment occurs in a context of critical and socialist realism, stemming from a progressive outlook. It is in this attempt to contextualize moral behaviour that the form of the story becomes as one with its social content, free of excessive and non-

1. Ibid, p.38.

functional padding in its structure and thus enabling the action to flow freely. When the writer uses the stream of consciousness technique, he does so in a simple and delicate manner that allows the style to serve the form and content of the story. As to the content itself, it emanates from a true understanding of the real world in which the writer lives, of everyday events he is witness to. At that period of the country's history and as a result of certain social factors, the writer found in the short story a fertile ground in which to conserve his ideas and theories on society, life and moral values. We can sense his call for social cohesion, to rid society of negative and disquieting factors, particularly within the family unit which, for al-Maghūr, represents a microcosm of society or even the world. The writer uses this in an attempt to change the macrocosmic world and rid it of the social contradictions that inflicted such misery on the Libyan people during that period of their history.

In Al-Yamīn (The Oath),⁽¹⁾ he deals, in a realistic vein, with the relationship that can obtain between a wife and her mother-in-law and the unsavoury effect this has on married life generally. The mother-in-law in the story is a

1. Ibid, p.97.

portrait of a traditional mother in conservative Libyan society. She is described as a woman who complains incessantly because she is unable to bear the burdens of running the home. For this reason, she pushes her son into marriage with a girl whom she had, at first, spoken very kindly of. When they get married and true love develops between the couple, it upsets the mother-in-law and she plans intrigue. She accuses the new wife of having used sorcery on her husband in order to make him hostile towards his own mother and a sullen and gloomy atmosphere replaces the once happy life in the home. The mother tells her son to divorce his wife and the writer draws a picture for us of the husband's inner struggle between his love for his wife and his mother's demands. He becomes confused and finds the tension and anxiety very difficult to bear. He therefore pays a visit to a Sheikh and tells him of his problem. The writer succeeds in selecting the right images and the right moments that reflect several of the social factors and circumstances that pertain here. He pictures the husband as governed by and subservient to various traditional social values and customs. The story ends when the husband gradually decides against the idea of divorce, uttering the Prophet's words "The most hated of permitted things in the sight of God is divorce." The writer is here emphasizing

the fact that the mother is often responsible for wrecking the lives of her children because her lack of education has rendered her selfish and narrow-minded. She therefore sees things from a very limited perspective that is hers alone.

It is noteworthy that al-Maghūr does not usually regard the woman as the focal point of his stories. She is simply part of her immediate society, part of her social class, an individual who experiences the same conditions and circumstances as everyone else and al-Maghūr does not award her any special prominence. There is not one female character who, it can be argued, represents a call for the emancipation of women. Al-Maghūr does not permit the woman to move freely, to act in accordance with her development and ideas in the sphere of women's progress and liberation.

Any reader of al-Maghūr's stories will discover limited elements of psychological and social analysis exemplified many times in his work. Yet, despite this, al-Maghūr does not treat the diverse psychological conditions and situations that women find, the emotional fluctuations that affect how they feel in the face of different situations involving love and marriage. Nor does he deal with the socio-political stance of women in such a way as to shed light on their social and cultural position. Likewise, he does not make the issue of women themselves a central pivot by which to

explain the social, political and cultural struggle that is going on in Libyan society between the old ways and the new, or to create an awareness of the backwardness that women suffer in our society. In his stories, the woman is represented in her customary role of the wife and mother and this is to be seen clearly in the writer's concern for family and social problems such as marriage and divorce, although these are, in the main, viewed from a traditional perspective.

In the short story entitled Al-Milād (The Birth),⁽¹⁾ al-Maqhūr spotlights the situation of the mother-in-law in the same way and pictures her as of a capricious turn of mind. Although it is a true and honest picture of women, from a realistic and critical point of view it is not enough. In this story, she is shown as a woman who is governed by the social traditions and varied circumstances that accompany the traditional Libyan marriage. Al-Maqhūr provides us with a view of the young Libyan woman, of her fears and anxieties arising out of the customs and rituals that adhere to the fixed marriage, one in which the girl has absolutely no say in the choice of husband. The author, in his stories, is not writing social literature as a protest against

1. Ibid, p.83.

backwardness in society and to condemn the existing conditions suffered by women in spite of his public appeal for an overall change in Libyan society when he deals with political issues. Al-Maghūr does not criticise tradition in his writings; he does, apparently, support it and this can be sensed in the exaggerated manner in which he crystallizes the situation of the bridegroom who sees his bride for the very first time on their wedding night. Nevertheless, the young man feels a strong affection for his new wife. Al-Maghūr, when he writes about the effect that traditional habits and customs have upon the feelings and affections felt by his characters, does so from behind a thick veil of social reserve. The following passage shows clearly the meeting and conversation that takes place between the married couple. It is a somewhat overplayed situation for no man could fall so quickly in love with a woman he has never seen before, particularly in the uneasy circumstances of the wedding night:

فابتسمت ابتسامة خافتة بانث غلى أثرها أسنانها الناصعة
البياض . كان كل شيء في الصغيرة يعجبني .. حتى تلك اللحظات
على الأقل .. وكنت أسف على اننى لم أعرفها منذ زمن .
وان هناك أياما كثيرة من عمرنا انقضت وانا أبحث عنها وهى
نفسها تبحث عني ..
انت حلوة يا زينوبه .
فارتعشت يداها .. واحمر وجهها خجلا .. ومدت لي المنديل مرة
اخرى وهى تقول في صوت خافت .. مخنوق ..
حتى انت يا ممطفي ..

كانت تجلس على كرسي وسط الحجرة .. وكانت ثياب العرس
الثقيلة تحجب عني كل شيء .. ولكنني كنت أحس بها في
اعماقي تتسرب في ببطء تسرب حبات
العرق

She gave a faint smile that revealed her so bright teeth. I was impressed by everything about her, at least till those moments. I was sorry I had only known her for such a short period, that so much time had passed by in my life while I had been searching for her, and she for me.

'You are lovely, Zaynūba.'

Her hands trembled and her face blushed red with embarrassment. She again held out her handkerchief for me and, in a choked whisper, said:

'So are you, Muṣṭafā.'

She was sitting on the chair and her bridal gown hid everything from my sight. Yet, I felt her image in my very soul, slowly trickling down deep inside me like beads of sweat.⁽¹⁾

From the artistic point of view, al-Maḡhūr has the ability to shift from one time dimension to another, between the present and the past, as well as to get deep within his characters by making use of flashback and association of ideas relevant to the situation, and blending dreams with reality. The foregoing passage is presented in the form of a flashback when the husband, a bakery worker, remembers his conversation with his wife on their wedding night. He leaves the bakery and heads for home because his wife is

1. Kāmil al-Maḡhūr, 14 Qiṣṣa, p.89.

expecting to give birth; unfortunately, the husband is in an extremely worried and anxious frame of mind because his wife has previously suffered miscarriages. It is here that al-Maghūr focuses in on the role of the mother-in-law and her attitude towards her son's wife: she has told her son to divorce his wife because she has no children and is of no use to him. Muḥammad Amīn al-^CĀlim has this to say concerning this touching situation and others like it in al-Maghūr's work:

Al-Maghūr's stories abound with anxiety , with pain , with sorrow , with simple cravings with expectation of an end to suffering with dreams of happiness, a settled life and love.⁽¹⁾

In addition to feelings of hope and dread that run through **14 Qissa**, al-Maghūr also turns his attention to the sense of isolation people suffer when away from home, when they leave the village in order to seek work in the city, as in Al-Salām ^Calā Mansūra (Greetings to Mansūra).⁽²⁾ In this story, the writer takes this feeling of estrangement as the central theme because of its social significance. He wishes to highlight the fact that the more one feels estranged, the

1. Muḥammad Amīn al-^CĀlim, "14 Qiṣṣa Min Madīnatī", Majallat al-Ruwwād, No.13, Tripoli (1965), p.60.

2. Kāmil al-Maghūr, 14 Qiṣṣa, pp.109 ff.

more feelings of love and nostalgia for one's home and family take hold. The central character in this story has left for the city in search of work but becomes severely disillusioned when he spends two months without finding a job - the hard fact of life is that the number of people out of work exceeds the number of available jobs.

At this level, we find al-Maḡhūr to be closer to the Aristotelian concept that the art-work should be founded upon the principle or idea of mimesis or imitation of reality. As the story progresses, the central character's affection for his wife and child increases. This is, indeed, a very real phenomenon among many Libyan people and thus we find the character roaming around the crowded city streets seeing the face of his wife on every woman. However, there is one thing that distinguishes his wife from all these other women - the characteristic tattoos that are the hallmark of the customs and traditions of his village. The story concludes when he approaches a young man and asks him to write a letter to his wife Maṣṣūra in which he tells her of his love for her and his longing for the village, and how he will soon be returning home.

(C) Lack of Critical Realism

Al-Maḡhūr endeavours, in his writings, to reach the very

essence of things, to explore the very depths of humankind with all its solitudes, emotions and feelings, to reach the essence of life itself with all its contradictions at different levels. He also attempts to crystallize and delineate some of the social, political and psychological attitudes prevailing in society and, in so doing, adopts a very clear standpoint in their regard. This standpoint is not, however, based upon a critical-realist approach to the themes of his short stories, especially in regard to women.

In **14 Qiṣṣa Min Madīnatī**, which was published in 1978 (2nd. edition), al-Maqhūr raises many social issues such as the problems of subjugation, material poverty, estrangement through leaving one's home in the countryside to look for work in the city, and the anxieties that beset simple people. This assortment of feelings and attitudes are the background against which the writer creates his stories. He has tried to follow the development of the modern story in the Arab world and in Arab culture and, for this reason, utilises a realistic approach in a convincing and tangible way. In the collection **Al-Ams al-Mashnūq**, published in 1968, al-Maqhūr dispenses with a direct style in favour of a realistic structure and form. His stories contain many issues and problems all of which he tackles in a variety of approaches and artistic forms - the relationship between the individual and the group in an urban context, society's

values, traditions and conceptions, etc. In many of the stories in this anthology, he makes use of modern techniques, such as internal dialogue, flashback, and the replacement of narrative by a snapshot-like style full of implication. Furthermore, he writes about nothing unless he has experienced it personally. In this, he resembles al-Quwayrī's writings in the field of realism - relating the short story to actual life in Libya without adhering to narrow-minded concepts and beliefs.

Al-Maqhūr's stories cover a fixed period in his life, up to 1966. They have to be studied in their historical context and in the framework of the economic, social, political and cultural environment of the time. It was within such circumstances that the writer became increasingly conscious of the problem concerning the relationship between form and content in the short story. Al-Maqhūr searches for organic unity between the form and content but occasionally fails when he looks for content outside the scope of his personal experience. He is unable to imagine it or convert it into authentic art. In 14 **Qisṣa**, he pictures the lives of the working-class and what they suffer in Libyan society. He is a skilled artist when it comes to choosing the appropriate moment in life's experience and he succeeds in intensifying the events

without divorcing the action from the central character. Consequently, there exist no barriers that would render false or unlikely the relationship between his characters and the events in which they find themselves involved, between one's feelings, on the one hand, and social reality, on the other. Al-Maqhūr's stories reflect an image of loneliness, of estrangement and loss, of leaving the country to seek work in the city; likewise, an image of family and social problems like those to do with love, marriage and divorce. There are stories that deal with life in society and the daily reality of living, stories that proceed from a full understanding of socio-political conditions and a well-defined view of what constitutes social reality. The most significant stories are Būkha (The Drunkard)⁽¹⁾ and Al-Salām Calā Manṣūra.⁽²⁾ Therein, al-Maqhūr highlights the essential nature of the distressing effects society can have on people, not, in the first instance, as a social phenomenon but as a very real dimension of political life. In Būkha, the action takes place in the context of the Italian occupation of Libya. Both the central characters in Al-Salām Calā Manṣūra and Būkha are, in the main, powerless

1. Kāmil al-Maqhūr, 14 Qiṣṣa, pp.17 ff.

2. Ibid, pp.109 ff.

to compete and hold their own in the face of opposition. Nonetheless, they both sense that it is not worth struggling and persevering - the political crises and social traumas have engraved in their minds a sense of resignation that accompanies them in their search for work. The central character in Būkha says:

ربما أجد .. سنيورا .. أو "سنيورة" في حاجة الى
حمل ، ربما انحنيت في أدب وابتسمت في ارتخاء وذلة
ثم قلت .. سنيورة ...
وقد تنظر إلي في شفقة .. وقد تنظر إلي في غضب
وتأفف ولكنها ربما قالت في لهجة فيها رنة واشمئزاز
كوانتو ... ؟

Maybe I will find a signore or signora in need of someone to carry their luggage: maybe I would bow politely, with a soft but humble smile then I would say: 'Signora' She may look on me kindly or may be very angry and displeased But she may say in a thick accent and with a ring of disgust: 'How much is that? '(1)

What the writer is concerned with here is carefully choosing a very important and concentrated moment in which to portray people and life and to express the main theme of the story. In Al-Salām Calā Manṣūra, such a concentrated moment is crystallized when the central character leaves the countryside to search for work in the city in order to

1. Ibid, pp.22-23.

support his wife and child. His unfortunate circumstances assume tragic proportions:

ومنذ شهرين لم ابعت بشيء .. الا جوابا واحد
بدون رد . ولم أحصل أبدا على عمل .. ولم استطع ان أعيش
أو اعود .. فقد وجدت الناس يبحثون عن أعمال
الناس أكثر من الاعمال

It's been two months now and I haven't sent anything, except one letter for which I have not received a reply. I have not found work at all. I can neither live nor go back. I have found people looking for work. There are more people than there are jobs.⁽¹⁾

In both of these stories, Al-Maghūr succeeds (as he does in many) in describing his own feelings about people oppressed and crushed by society. The central character represents the average man-in-the-street, or ordinary simple chap, who floats along on the surface of life with both pride and dignity. The writer is also adept at choosing the appropriate moment to express the characters and events in such a way as to reveal the most significant features in our own lives as Libyans. He is bent on condemning society by way of personifying a clear and defined viewpoint of social problems within an accepted literary art form. Despite the number of subjects tackled by al-Maghūr, he manages to avoid

1. Ibid, p.114.

hackneyed and ready-made approaches and steers clear of superficial treatment dependent upon narrative as well as brash oratory.

The woman as depicted in **14 Qiṣṣa** is a traditional person who is never involved in other than the affectionate or loving relationships that do exist between men and women, and this is how it is in any traditional story. It is an affection that is always there until the end of the story and we find no complex relationships between men and women, between one individual and another, or between the individual and society. Al-Maghūr does not approach the problem of deep and hidden emotions that cause a struggle within women. In Al-Milād,⁽¹⁾ Al-Yamīn,⁽²⁾ Al-Sundūq al-Akhḍhar (The Green Box)⁽³⁾, Al-Kūra⁽⁴⁾ and Al-Salām ʿalā Mansūra,⁽⁵⁾ the writer paints a picture of social reality through his own experiences and knowledge of day-to-day life in Libya. Nevertheless, he fails to tackle the things that go on deep inside his female characters, as if the woman

1. Ibid, pp.83 ff.

2. Ibid, pp.97 ff.

3. Ibid, pp.133 ff.

4. Ibid, pp.31 ff.

5. Ibid, pp.109 ff.

were in complete harmony with the real world. One reason for this may be the fact that he centres his attention on social issues, especially the family structure and the problems, both from within and without, that the family has to face, with particular emphasis on the image of the 'mother-in-law' and her role in society. This is seen in Al-Milād in which, for example, the writer concentrates on the feelings and sentiments of the central character and of his love of children, particularly in the face of his wife's susceptibility to miscarriage. The writer depicts the mother-in-law in her traditional, dictatorial role and the part she plays in the life of her son. Al-Maghūr does this by means of story-telling, realistic narrative and external depiction of the minutest details of family life. The writer's skill in shifting between the present and the past, between different characters and places, is most apparent; in other words, he varies his approach between flashbacks and association of ideas in his portrayal of the characters. He does not depend overmuch on narrative language and thus there is less dependence on external depiction, replaced as it is by internal monologue and other artistic devices. He spotlights the social rituals and traditions which accompany the wedding night; the following

passage reflects the charged and inspired moment chosen by the author, when the bride and bridegroom meet for the first time:

كان العرق ينزف من مسارب لامرئية من جدى يفرقني
في طوفان من الماء . وزينوبة تنقل عينيها في أرجاء
الحجرة خائفة كقطعة مدعورة .. والعرق يتصبب من جبينها وينزل
على وجهها فيزيل الكثير من الاصباغ التي دهنت بها .. وبحث
عن منديل تمسح به العرق فأدخلت يدي في جيب
" الفرملة " وقلت وأنا ارتعش هاكي محرمة ..
ومدت يدها وخفضت عينيها ثم قالت .
.. صحيت

فاغتنمت الفرصة وقلت من وراء أسناني المرتعشة الحمد لله
اللي تكلمتي .. كنت نحسبك
بكوشة ..

The sweat was dripping profusely and unseen down my body, inundating me in a deluge of water . . . Zaynūba shifted her eyes around the room, timid as a frightened kitten, the sweat pouring from her brow and running down her face, causing her make-up to run . . . I searched for a handkerchief with which to wipe off the sweat. I felt in the pocket of my waist-coat and said, trembling,

'Here you are, take a handkerchief.'

She stretched out her hand and lowered her eyes, then said,

'Thank you.'

I seized the opportunity and said, as my teeth jittered, 'Praise God, you've spoken . . . I thought you couldn't speak.'⁽¹⁾

Al-Maqhūr, in the above passage, describes the experience

1. Ibid, pp.88-89.

by means of a flashback, when the husband remembers his wedding night. The writer's intention is to draw a detailed picture of the situation and, despite the excitement of this highly-charged moment, yet it is one that is approached in a tone that is both soft and calm. The author's shortcoming, however, lies in the fact that he fails to treat the story in a spirit of critical realism, nor does he proceed from a forward-looking viewpoint insofar as the problem of women's liberation is concerned. Al-Maghūr fails to give the social dimension in the story the same concern as he devotes to the events themselves.

* * *

CHAPTER IV

KHALĪFA AL-TIKBĀLĪ

(A) The Relevance of Biography

It is impossible to divorce Khalīfa al-Tikbālī's life from his writings. He led a very harsh childhood that lacked a comprehensive formal education and no sooner was he old enough than he found a job working in a petrol station in order to earn his living. At the same time, he felt within him an overwhelming and indomitable desire to write, a feeling engendered in him through his wish to escape the reality of the world which, in his eyes, was unbearable. He went to Germany for three years and worked in a number of fields before enrolling at college to study German and to continue his interest in literature. However, three years was not enough to gain fluency in the German language as far as literary appreciation was concerned and, consequently, it cannot be argued that it had any influence upon his writing.

Born on March 15th 1938, Khalīfa al-Tikbālī attended his district primary school and later gained the evening-class preparatory certificate. He then joined a secondary school

but, due to financial circumstances, was unable to continue his studies, having, as mentioned, to work as a labourer in order to earn money. After his sojourn in Germany, he returned to Libya and entered the Military Academy in 1963, graduating with the rank of second-lieutenant in 1965. At this time, his early interest in literature was making itself apparent and he was considered to be in the vanguard of the young generation of short story writers. The majority of the local newspapers and magazines published his stories and he won the first Literary Competition organised by the Libyan Youth Organisation in 1965. Following this, he entered every literary competition, achieving success in those organised by The Association for Thought and Ideas, and the National Radio, as well as winning the Supreme Arts Council prize for literature, all in 1965. His entry in this latter competition was the **Tamarrud** (Rebellion) collection of stories which was published in 1966. The Revolution honoured him in the First Festival of Knowledge. His success in competitions and his recognition by society as a man of literary stature were not easily come by for al-Tikbālī. On the other hand, he was a man who managed to live two lives: one military, one civil. It is noticeable how he managed to convey both his internal and external worlds in his literary output without ever making mention of

his military life. During his childhood and a part of his youth al-Tikbālī had immersed himself thoroughly in the district of the old city where he lived, mixing with the people, listening to their conversations and experiencing all that went on, sadness and misery included. His environment was one of a teeming mass of humanity and the harsh lifestyle of the working-class left an indelible imprint on his sensibility. The new environment which he encountered in Germany likewise proved a rich source for his imagination.⁽¹⁾ Al-Tikbālī died at the young age of 28 in 1966.

From the outset, al-Tikbālī's literary output was prodigious, writing more than forty short stories, his entire works, in less than eight years, something no other Libyan writer has achieved in such a short period of time.⁽²⁾ It is conceivable he managed to say all that he wanted to say during this period. The imprint he left on the world of the short story can never be erased and one can feel, in his works, the hardship and the difficulties he encountered within Libya and in Germany as well as his deep

1. Khalīfa Ḥusayn Muṣṭafā, Dhākirat al-Kalimāt Dirāsa fī Adab Khalīfa al-Tikbālī, Tripoli (1980), p.11.

2. Aḥmad al-Ḥarīrī, "Al-Tikbālī fī Suṭūr: al-Adīb alladhī Ghāb Majallat al-Idhāʿa, No.6, (1972).

concern with social problems in all their varied dimensions. It is for this reason that one cannot separate the influences upon his life from his stories, whether in his choice and diversity of characters or in their behaviour within the society. It is noticeable that individual rebellion or recalcitrance constitutes an important element in his depiction of social reality and social problems generally. It is this rebellion which is made quite clear and does, at times, create a feeling of pride within his characters. Mostly, it is rebellion against the real world; it is not, however, an ideological concept against particular economic conditions or social situations, or against cultural and social underdevelopment as a result of, for example, certain political situations. This rebellion by the individual is nothing but an emotional reaction represented in a concrete, artistic form by the writer in most of his stories.

Al-Tikbālī's stories tackle a variety of subjects but the common themes are of deviant behaviour that brings about the break-up of the family, childhood transgressions and vagrancy, failure in the field of child education, the fiasco of divorce and the husband's desertion of the wife. These subjects are flanked by a myriad social conceptions

but al-Tikbālī does not offer complete treatment of the problems because he fails to convey an elaborate picture of the identity and nature of Libyan society, a society that reflects an enormous number of inherited customs that have been created and formulated over many centuries. The period of the fifties and the sixties in Libya, unlike certain neighbouring countries such as Egypt, was not one renowned for a clearly-defined social movement or the emergence of developing ideas among thinkers. This resulted in a certain disorganisation and lack of clear, realistic concepts among some Libyan writers and critics - realism cannot be stabilised or develop properly unless there is appropriate social development within the country, particularly in the field of literary studies on both an academic and general cultural level. Because of these factors, al-Tikbālī's concept of realism was a purely rudimentary one and he had no full appreciation or awareness of realism as such. As we shall see, this erroneous conception of reality is made apparent in most of al-Tikbālī's stories. His is an uncritical realism that has little to do with good art. For example, the stories tend to suffer from the direct statement approach and emphasis on the narration of events, the author making use of a dry, narrative linguistic style that denotes a collection of past events and personal

recollections scattered here and there and in which the foreign element, i.e. 'the foreign woman' occupies a major role. If this demonstrates anything at all, it is that al-Tikbālī gives an illusion of critical tone that is not critical in the true sense of the word. For this reason, it is difficult to agree with the critic Khalīfa Ḥusayn Muṣṭafā when he says:

Khalīfa al-Tikbālī understood and saw vividly all the prevailing and arbitrary social contradictions existing in society. He views them with a sadness and an anger and he wants everything to be immediately turned inside-out.⁽¹⁾

The truth of the matter is that al-Tikbālī was not aware of all the social contradictions, contrary to what this critic believes. His stories are a form of implied protest and adopt a form that reveals all of the personal feeling and emotion that moves the author. In a newspaper article entitled "Naḥwa Munāqasha Ṣarīḥa l-il Qiṣṣa al-Lībīyya" (A Frank Discussion on the Libyan Story), Amīn Māzin says:

The truth is that most of the experiences portrayed in stories by certain writers are nothing but a reiteration of experiences which they have already presented. I often feel when I read this

1. Khalīfa Ḥusayn Muṣṭafā, Dhākirat al-Kalimāt, p.7.

kind of story and involve myself in the lives of its characters that I am reading something that is unreal. If it were not for my extensive knowledge of life in the past in all its various forms, I would never have realised that I was reading a Libyan author.⁽¹⁾

This passage sheds much light upon al-Tikbālī's technique as an artist. It helps to throw into bold relief the fact that there is no local colour, no mention of typically Libyan determinants or factors which shape or influence the characters or the events. It is in consequence of this defect that al-Tikbālī, as we shall see, cannot easily focus his vision of reality, hint at his aims and intentions or objectify them, or show the way in which what is typically Libyan, in the sphere of morals, culture or character, differs from what we find in any other environment. From the artistic point of view, we should stress the fact that no definite concept has been formed in al-Tikbālī's mind - he writes stories that have no relationship to any artistic school. He presents general ideas that are intended to express his viewpoint on life and they are simply not the expression of a writer who is completely aware of the problems of literary reality or even of current social issues. Similarly, the writer fails to realize that the

1. Amīn Māzin, "Nahwā Munāqasha Sarīḥa li al-Qiṣṣa al-Lībiyya", Majallat al-Idhāʿa, No.24, (1967), p.51.

causes of weakness and misfortune are latent in social, political and economic environments that help to fossilize an outdated Libyan mentality with its rigid concepts and inherited practices that are inappropriate in this 20th century.

(B) The Subjective Approach to Women in his Short Stories

The importance of biographical factors in the appreciation of al-Tikbālī has been alluded to above. We may illustrate this point by referring to the story entitled Inqaddimlak Ukhtī Su^Cād (I Introduce You To My Sister Su^Cād),⁽¹⁾ in which all the main ideas revolve around the portrayal of the Libyan woman. It represents, in the way al-Tikbālī registers the theme, not so much objective reality but the personal opinion of the author. As in other stories by him, his illustration of the problems that women have to face is a direct reflection of his attitude towards these problems. The central plot of the story is that of a romance between Su^Cād and Faṭḥī who both belong to petit bourgeois Libyan families. Faṭḥī is a junior functionary who has become infatuated with Su^Cād, a student. The third

1. Khalīfa al-Tikbālī, Al-A^Cmāl al-Kāmila, Al-Dār al-^CArabiyya li al-Kitāb, Libya (1976), pp.125 ff.

character in the story is ʿAlī, Suḥād's brother, who is meant to represent the viewpoint of the cultured Libyan, a man who, apart from his work, is interested in reading literature on intellectual issues; it is possible that Suḥād is influenced by her brother in her own attitudes to life. There are certain realistic details in the story such as the secret and covert way in which Suḥād and Faṭḥī swap love-letters in the street. The heroine is described as veiled, a device used by al-Tikbālī to show the closed society that Libya is vis-a-vis women's emancipation. However, the solution chosen by the author to resolve his story is a purely arbitrary one in that the brother is depicted as being exceedingly tolerant on the issue of the love between his sister and Faṭḥī. It is noticeable that the meetings that take place between Faṭḥī and ʿAlī are marked by a rational conversation and discussion on the role of Libyan tradition in the creation of such situations. This conversation brings out the fact that there are indirect and hidden feelings in the society, fossilized and rigid, especially in regard to natural affections between a man and a woman. In fact, it is the discussion of this point which is presented as the pivot of the story and which is artistically weak. Instead of embodying concrete situations

which convey the point about outmoded traditions, we are given a theoretical discussion. What is astonishing is that 'Alī accompanies his sister to visit Fathī's home to get to know him or to announce the courtship officially. This is something totally alien, not only in Libya, but elsewhere in the Arab world.

This, then, is the arbitrary method used by al-Tikbālī in order to find a solution to the problems that confront the Libyan woman. Essentially, it is a solution based on achieving an equilibrium between traditional practices and the demands of modern life, particularly as regards the liberation of women. However, the way in which the author offers this solution, one that depends upon the existence of strong and refined senses such as selflessness and respect for others as exemplified in the brother, does not accord with the reality of the woman's situation as it should be depicted in the Libyan short story.

It is al-Tikbālī's concern with this equilibrium on a theoretical level that is largely responsible for the fact that the author does seriously attempt to objectify the experience. He does not concern himself with tangible details, such as the reality of day-to-day life, whether in connection with the description of the people embodied in the story, their features, traits etc., or even as regards a description of the street in which the story begins.

Furthermore, in our opinion, the development of the situation corresponds to a preconceived theoretical plan and does not evolve in a natural way due to the arbitrary solution already pointed out. The plot centres around the love of Fathī and Su^Cād, and of how quickly they respond to each other on first meeting. The writer is dealing here with the kind of love that must inevitably be consummated in marriage. Thus, it is the feelings and emotions of the male character, swept away, as they are, in a tide of passion, that constitutes the main axis around which the story takes place, a course of development that is far from being objective on either a social or cultural plane. This approach is probably intended to reflect the psyche of the central male character and the feeling of deprivation and psychological frustration he suffers in regard to emotional issues; it is for this reason that he remains in a romantic and dreamy frame of mind throughout the story. Moreover, al-Tikbālī, in his portrayal of female characters, reiterates the same features over and over again. The woman is usually carried away by a current that is inconsistent with her social reality; consequently, his writings lack the logical progression or development that is so necessary in the proper structure of events. Such is the case in the stories entitled Al-Faqīh (The Faqīh, or Theologian), Kalām al-Nās

(People's Talk) Wajh al-Jarīma (Face of the Crime) and other stories which are discussed below, both structurally and thematically. The male character, in the story under consideration - the romance, so uncommon in Libyan society, between a young man, Fathī and a girl, Su^Cād - represents a typical youth in love while Su^Cād is shown to be daring in expounding her love for him. She begins to make overtures to Fathī when they meet suddenly in front of her school when the students are leaving. Fathī feels very embarrassed especially as Su^Cād begins to send him messages. Other details are given to the reader that all point to an artificially-conceived plan of events.

In the anthology **Al-A^Cmāl al-Kāmila** (The Complete Works), published in 1976, mention is made of the contradictions that exist in certain social, political and economic contexts. In this regard, perhaps the most important stories are Al-Faqīh (The Faqīh)⁽¹⁾ and Al-Isba^C al-Majrūh (The Injured Finger).⁽²⁾ In this latter story, al-Tikbālī criticizes the concept of the wedding ceremony and its accompanying celebrations as a lifeless ritual that is totally out of step with the spirit of the age. Through highlighting in detail various periods in his life together

1. Ibid, pp.33 ff.

2. Ibid, pp.101 ff.

with the difficulties he has encountered, the writer succeeds in giving the reader an informative portrait of the story's central character as well as of the story's working background as depicted in the popular and family ritual of the wedding ceremony and the wedding night. Above all, the story attempts to delineate the deep psychological stirrings experienced by a young man and a young woman who are to live under one roof but have never previously been acquainted. It concentrates on the love and affection which the bridegroom feels towards his new bride and her own fear and uncertainty. The bridegroom is an educated and cultured young man who, after the death of his father, is responsible for maintaining the family; he is bent on improving his own station in life as well as that of his mother. His proposal of marriage to the young woman is made in the traditional manner and we can sense the difficult situation the bride finds herself in, especially the embarrassing moment when she sees the bridegroom for the first time. Nevertheless, the bridegroom does manage to create a certain kind of affection and harmony between himself and the girl on their wedding night, laughing and joking with her as he tries to relax her and make her more comfortable.

There is a knock on the door - it is the bridegroom's friends asking him to come out. For the honour of the

family, the bridegroom must show, by means of a white cloth, that the girl is a virgin. The young man leaves the bedroom and looks at everyone in astonishment while many of those present accuse him of not being a man. He, for his part, feels a deep urge to fight against this cordon of what he considers to be dated and outmoded social traditions. He approaches his bride and, in a bid to alleviate the anxiety and embarrassment she is feeling, says:

لا تخافي .. لن يحدث شيء .. سوف ننتظر . ولم تفهم
نظرت الي بينما حركت جسدها غريزيا حسب التعليمات امامنا
وقت طويل .. سنعيش مع بعضنا ... واشرق وجهها . بالفرح
بالامتنان بالحب .. ومدت يدها الرقيقة تلمس يدي في خجل
وتواضع .. فانحنيت اقبلها في جينها بحنان وتعمدت ان ابقى
فترة طويلة احادثها واسايرها قبل ان اخرج احمل
علم انتصاري المزيف لا لقيه على
الوحوش المزمجرة .

"Don't be afraid. Nothing will happen. We'll wait." She failed to understand and looked at me vacantly while she moved her body instinctively as she had been instructed. "We have a long time ahead of us, living with each other." Her face lit up in joy, gratitude and love . . . and she bashfully held her hand out to mine. I bowed and kissed her tenderly on her forehead. I was going to stay with her some while, talking and getting to know her, before I went to display my false banner of victory to the roaring savages outside.⁽¹⁾

Al-Tikbālī portrays the female character as a passive girl trampled under the ruthless yoke of misguided customs

1. Khalīfa al-Tikbālī, Al-A^cmāl al-Kāmila, pp.116-117.

imposed upon her by both her family and society. However, we feel that the solution to the problem facing the bride and bridegroom as provided by the author is an insufficient one with which to tackle this issue. It is an arbitrary or subjective solution which is far from being dialectically conceived. The injury which the writer concocts in this instance cannot go towards solving this social problem as a whole. His way of dealing with it is to have the bridegroom fool the people outside as to his deflowering of the bride because he does not want the girl, towards whom he feels very drawn, to have to submit to an outmoded social ritual. In regard to Al-Isba^c al-Majrūḥ, the Libyan critic, Khalīfa Ḥusayn Muṣṭafā, says that al-Tikbālī fails to alleviate

the harsh effect of the overwhelming and iniquitous relationship that exists between men and women in the shadow of the traditional marriage, a shadow that is always there, sanctifying, within its sweep, the oldest way known for man to possess and hold mastery over one or more women for their entire lives. The bridegroom in the story defends himself ardently and passionately against outmoded customs. Nevertheless, the relationship between himself and his wife was not, from the outset, one of equality. It is the man who decides to get married and not the girl. It is the man who determines and chooses for so long as love remains a persecuted and exiled emotion. The principle of free choice does not exist for the woman and remains mere longing on her part. The concept of owning a woman's body has, with the passing of time, gained strength and become more and more deeply-rooted in our society.⁽¹⁾

1. Khalīfa Ḥusayn Muṣṭafā, Dhākirat al-Kalimāt, p.83.

There are other stories dealing with the issue of women from various points of view. In Kalām al-Nās (People's Talk),⁽¹⁾ the theme revolves around the idea of honour in the traditional sense and spells out clearly the contradiction between the traditional view of life on the one hand, and the education and emancipation of women on the other. The story concerns a working-class father who has a job in a workshop. Sālīm, who works alongside him, wants to marry his daughter, Fāṭima, but she, for her part, wants to finish her education, an issue in which she is supported by her mother. So as to emphasize the contradiction that exists, the author details many of the rumours spread by Sālīm, the would-be suitor, about the girl's behaviour. These rumours and their social repercussions form the basis of the story and, although they are false, they have far-reaching effects on the father. Al-Tikbālī uses the stream-of-consciousness technique to convey the thoughts and association of ideas going on in the father's mind; however, it must be said that these do not always accord with the father's level of education, especially when he compares, for example, traditional concepts and developed ideas in the

1. Ibid, pp.163 ff.

modern world. He asks himself:

ما الذى حدث لعقله ؟ ماذا دهاه ؟ حتى صار
كالأعوبة بين يدي ابنة صبية وزوجة ناقصة
عقل .. ما الذى جرده^١ رجولته وتجبره .. أهـو
منطق العمر .. وان الدنيا تغيرت كما يقولون
وماله هو وما للدينا .

What had happened to his mind? What calamity had befallen him that he had become a plaything in the hands of a daughter and a simple-minded wife? What had deprived or stripped him of his virile quality and compulsive, overwhelming power? Was it the logic of the age? The world had changed, as they say? But of what concern was that to him?⁽¹⁾

There is no doubt that the word rujūla in Arabic is a culturally significant concept and should be taken metaphorically, suggesting honour, dignity or self-respect rather than 'virility'. We see here that al-Tikbālī tackles the problem of women by depicting the Libyan woman in a stage of transition between traditional habits and points of view and those of the modern age and the problems that arise from women's education. In the end, however, al-Tikbālī's is a somewhat exaggerated situation. The father kills his wife and daughter because of the rumours that have been spread around the neighbourhood. That the author ends the story in this way is, however, attributable to the fact that

1. Ibid, p.173.

he wishes to stress the power that tradition wields in Libyan society and the difficulties that society faces in giving women education and liberation. However, this overstatement in his expose and analysis lacks the artistic aspect due to the fact that, in general, the short story depends upon suggestion, pace and sharp focusing, not upon a contrived technique or unrealistic solutions. The writer does manage to reflect the father's feelings but conveys his personality and character in a way that shows how his, the writer's, depiction of reality is limited to a purely descriptive record, i.e. al-Tikbālī does not tackle the issue from a point of view of critical realism that would allow him to rid the story of those superfluous additives and ideas that tend to disrupt the smooth development of events. It is these superfluities that inhibit both the artistic aspect and the exploration of the psychological dimension that should give one a true insight into the characters, not simply a surface impression. This shortcoming can be seen, firstly, in the confrontation between the father and Salīm who wishes to marry his daughter and, secondly, in the way the father faces the reaction of the people in his neighbourhood. Nevertheless, a general picture is given of the father's appearance, of how depressed he has become over the things that are being

said about his wife and daughter. This expresses the mental state of an individual in a backward and underdeveloped society and how public opinion weighs heavily upon that individual. The father is depressed as a result of the way people treat him in the street and feels himself isolated. This highlights the rejection of the father's feeling of failure in the bringing-up of his daughter and he develops the will to assert himself as a man among his neighbours by killing his daughter. This underlines the repression and lack of liberty that is suffered by women. Al-Tikbālī records the events in order to evidence the position of women who are compelled to live in an environment that refuses to allow them either freedom or self-respect and, consequently, an education.

The writer does not give the reader the opportunity to find out for himself, through the texture of the story, the truth or falsity of the rumours that have been set against the girl and her mother. To have done so would have acted as an incentive for the reader to seek out the truth and this would have increased his enjoyment from an artistic point of view. On the contrary, al-Tikbālī resorts to direct statement. His concern with recording the events and portraying them in an exaggerated way shows, perhaps, that

he lacks a true sense of realism. Thus the artistic aspect is lost in favour of direct statement when the young man spreads rumours about the girl and when the people of the district begin to avoid the father. The writer, in all this, depends upon descriptive narrative which fails to evoke a deep impression of the female characters and what they are made to suffer in such dreadful circumstances. For this reason, we cannot agree with the Maghrebi critic, Mubārak Rabī^C, concerning the depiction of the male characters in al-Tikbālī's stories, when he says:

The central male character in al-Tikbālī's stories suffers, first and foremost, from the effects of tradition and social constraints. It is these that are responsible for the awful crises and predicaments his characters find themselves in, not subjective emotions. With this, Al-Tikbālī is observing a number of social ills such as superstitious rituals, and the generation gap.⁽¹⁾

In truth, the tragedy pictured by the writer lies in the interaction between female feelings and the subjective force of Libyan traditions and social pointed out by the critic. In other words, these two factors cannot be separated from each other and neither can their mutual relationship be ignored. Theirs is an important role in creating the

1. Mubārak Rabī^C, "Al-Wāqī^Ciyya wa al-Iltizām fī al-Uqṣūṣa al-Lībīyya", Al-Sha^Cb, No.15, May, 1970.

artistic effect so neglected in the short stories of al-Tikbālī. Undoubtedly, certain features of realism are to be found in al-Tikbālī's characters as, for instance, the fact that they resort to chicanery and the use of magic charms. Inevitably, people are faced with the torment of hardship and ignorance which they find themselves unable to bear and this is why they turn to witchcraft or the unknown in order to solve their problems. In fact, the author ties trickery and sorcery to the material level in poor families in Libyan society.

In Al-Faqīh, al-Tikbālī deals with the problem of un-working-class women who turn to sorcerous rituals and irrational solutions in order to solve the problems they have to face in life, particularly lack of self-realization and social or sexual frustrations. This story depicts the life of a simple working-class family. The head of the family has no children of his own but looks after his wife's daughter (by another man) who is very ill. The problem is how to cure the sick girl. The stepfather does not take her to a regular doctor for treatment but instead takes her to the Faqīh, an impostor whose fees are less than those of a doctor. It is noticeable that al-Tikbālī's portrait of the

Libyan woman is based, to a great extent, on the fact that she is, due to widespread ignorance, a passive creature. The girl, her mother and her stepfather are all caught up in the mesh of old customs and habits founded upon magical rituals and quackery which ignorance had generated throughout society on the part of men and women both. The Faqīh diagnoses that the girl is possessed by demons and states that he must be alone with her in the hut so as to fight off the evil spirits. However, he has other, purely sexually-motivated aims and violates the girl and this prompts him, at the end of the story, to ask for the girl's hand in marriage. Women's passivity is undoubtedly the central theme here but . it is a passivity engendered not by anything latent within women's nature itself, but by social and other exterior causes within her environment. Artistically, the story rests on a narrative approach and the gradual presentation of the characters' social background before the main gist of the story begins to unfurl. This may be because al-Tikbālī wishes to identify clearly the social function of each of his characters, although far more concentration is given to the social background of the man than of the women.

The literary movement in Libya has no clearly-defined and developed movement commensurate with a sense of true

realism, and that is something that cannot take root and evolve without social development. This is why there is a lack of awareness on the part of the writer as to the effects of the problems he tackles and he fails, as a consequence, to provide a true picture from all aspects. In al-Tikbālī's works, his artistic approach is unrelated to aesthetics or form; it is simply an expression of what the writer has in his mind and an exposition of social problems. His concept of realism may be described as uncritical for his approach to the social currents prevailing in the Libyan environment is founded upon giving facts without making critical comment. Al-Tikbālī spotlights the important aspects of the traditional society and illustrates them in an artistic way so as to provide a clear picture of the resultant environment. This can be seen in Muwazzaf Jadīd (A New Official)⁽¹⁾ and Al-Karāma (Dignity).⁽²⁾ In these, the writer deals with many of the political, economic and social issues and their bearing upon the working-class. New phenomena in Libyan society are also underscored, such as the psychological disturbances suffered by workers in oil companies and foreign bases.

1. Khalīfa al-Tikbālī, Al-A^Cmāl al-Kāmila, pp.23 ff.

2. Ibid, pp.118 ff.

Among the topics dealt with in **Al-A^Cmāl al-kāmila** is that of the problem of children and the psychological effect the adolescent age has on the child's personality. This is seen in Tamarrud (Rebellion)⁽¹⁾ and Al-Budhūr al-ḍā'i^Ca (The Lost Seeds).⁽²⁾ Furthermore, al-Tikbālī tackles a new phenomenon here in that his characters are not all taken from the Libyan environment but, particularly as regards the women, are foreigners. Despite the diversity of characters contained in his stories, al-Tikbālī fails to give a clear portrait of the features, characteristics and behaviour that distinguish the Libyan personality and we are thus at a disadvantage in not being completely acquainted with the character concerned. This is because his pale representation of the character makes it difficult to come to grips with the essential Libyan personality. Nor does it help us to understand the psychological stirrings deep within the Libyan and which control what he or she says or does. Such an approach prevents the reader from realising the true extent of the social relationship in Libya and a person's position in the social environment. This is the case with Wajh al-Jarīma (The Face of Crime)⁽³⁾ where the

1. Ibid, pp.7 ff.

2. Ibid, pp.71 ff.

3. Ibid, pp.47 ff.

central female character has no real relationship with the environment in which she lives. She is, in fact, a foreigner, part of a minority in Libyan society and, for this reason, does not set any criteria by which one may assess the personality of Libyan women. The author concretizes the female personality, not through a general human state of affairs but through situations involving sex and carnal desires, situations in which one loses all sense of right and wrong. As a result of this, the character is not presented in a clear light and this prevents the reader from having a true picture of the character concerned. An example of this can be seen in the following passage from Wajh al-Jarīma which clearly reveals the extent of the writer's concern with instinctive tendencies:

واهاجه صراخ المرأة .. فراح يضبط على عنقها
في حيرة وبلاهة محاولا اسكاتها .. وراحت المرأة
تخدشه في وجهه وتغرز اظافرهمـا
في لحمه كلبوة هائجة .

The woman's screaming agitated him and he exerted a stranglehold on her neck trying, in a helpless and foolish way, to silence her. She started to scratch him in the face and to dig her fingernails into his flesh like some excited lioness.⁽¹⁾

1. Ibid, p.68.

The use of "labwa" (lioness), which is the colloquial for "labu'a", evokes, unlike the English word, associations of sexual desire, often in an immoral sense. It implies in Arabic the depravity of women. What is immediately relevant, however, is that the writer, in many instances, concentrates upon the narration of events at the expense of the dramatic mode of presentation and of characterization. If he does concern himself at all with the character, it is simply in order to illustrate instinctive attitudes. For this reason, most of the stories lack that element of equilibrium between the character and the action, particularly as regards the female character whom he shows as nothing more than a means to sexual gratification and a sufferer of emotional frustration. Similarly, we are given no concrete details as to the external features of the characters and no attempt is made to assess the connection between any of the psychological stirrings taking place deep within them on the one hand, and what they say and do and how they behave, on the other.

Perhaps the most important relationship that should have been given treatment in his stories is that which arises between the central character of the story and the social environment that person lives in. In successful story

- a writer must have sufficient knowledge of the subject he is dealing with and must be able to provide proper content. For example, the purport of Wajh al-Jarīma is somewhat obscure save in the sphere of the sexual and psychological frustrations suffered by the man and woman. Due to the lack of several important factors in this story and there being no indications given as to the environment in which the characters live, this story fails to succeed from the outset, not to mention that the writer gives no convincing analysis of the instinctive tendencies he is bent on tackling.

The deviant behaviour of the female characters in al-Tikbālī's work does not originate in particular social or economic conditions which the woman may have to contend with and which would encourage her to indulge in socially-unacceptable behaviour. It is merely a proclamation of the turbulent passions and emotions in the psyche of the female, as in Qabla An Yamūt (Before He Dies).⁽¹⁾ This story is indicative of the obviously distorted picture al-Tikbālī gives of women in some of his stories. The woman is simply a sex symbol and is forever taking the initiative in satisfying her sexual instincts. This story has no real content, revolving around nothing more than the thoughts and

desires of a man and woman who are alone together in a house. The writer here makes no allowance for the difference that obtains between Libyan and Western cultures. Moreover, the following passage shows how al-Tikbālī devotes himself more to the character of the story without rendering that person's attitudes through the organic development of the events:

كل خلية في جسمه .. تنذر بالجوع والحرمان
وفجأة ايضاً هبت الثورة طاغية مدمرة ككل الثورات
جماهير ماخبة راحت تهتف في داخله . نـــــــريد
نـــــــريد .

Every cell in his body announced hunger and privation. Suddenly, he also felt a revolt brewing, overpowering and destructive in the way of all revolts: a vociferous mass deep within had begun calling out to him, crying 'We want, we want'.⁽¹⁾

In this passage, al-Tikbālī tends to over-dramatise the situation, relying upon the flexibility of Arabic as a medium for expressing strong feelings. Notwithstanding this flexibility, the attempt to compare the sexual desire to the surging power of the masses, as in a revolution, evidently reveals a highly exaggerated attitude which, in fact, is far from being reasonably objectified. It is not objectified

1. Ibid, p.283.

because it relies upon over-emphatic use of the emotive possibilities of Arabic.

(C) Literary Shortcomings

One might argue that the most prominent defect in al-Tikbālī's presentation of the characters in Wajh al-Jarīma and Qabla An Yamūt is that he is unable to furnish them with a situation distinctive enough to merit our attention, a moment that is truly effective and significant, even when it revolves around the matter of sex. Artistically, both of these stories are weak and disjointed. In Wajh al-Jarīma, for example, al-Tikbālī begins with a long introduction that relies on narrative and reiteration in such a way as to lose for us the human features of the characters and, as a result, we are denied any insight into the nature of the ever-moving, ever-changing dialectical relationship that links the character to individuals in the environment. The stories are mere anecdotes and statements delivered directly and with no dramatic effect and which are used to describe the characters involved. It is no exaggeration to say that Al-A^Cmāl al-Kāmila shows how unconcerned the writer is with the various aspects of the characters' personalities and how

he prefers to indulge in direct statement notwithstanding that there are differences in the artistic treatment the writer gives his various stories. In Mashā^cir Harima (Feelings of Old Age)⁽¹⁾ we witness probably the most mature artistic treatment of a story by al-Tikbālī. The characters and events are presented to us by spotlighting the central character, 'the old man', and the things that go on in his mind when he compares his past life and the present. He now wishes to marry a young girl for he feels that a wife will afford him both warmth and pleasure in his old age. When he fails to realize this dream, al-Tikbālī introduces the sexual factor when the old man's heart is set aflame by an American dancing girl who works in a night club. She meets him one day when she visits his street and arouses the man within him:

فلقد جلست هنا بجانبه .. رقيقة جميلة ..
 امرأة كاملة .. جلست هنا بكل جمالها وزينتها
 جلست بجانبه تضحك وتنظر له بعينها السوداء
 اللعوبتين وتمس يده .. تضع يدها البضة الملماء
 يدها التي تسحر .. تقتل .. تدخل في لحمه وتخرق
 عظامه لفرط رهافتها .

She sat next to him. Soft and beautiful. A perfect women. She sat here in all her beauty, in all her adornment, sitting beside him, laughing and

1. Ibid, pp.15 ff.

looking at him with her black, flirtatious eyes and touching his hand. She puts her smooth, tender hand . . . bewitching and fatal . . . digs it into his flesh, piercing the bone because it is hyper-sharp.⁽¹⁾

The story ends when the old, back-bent man asks where the nightclub is and follows her there.

This story, Mashā^cir Harima, together with Wajh al-Jarīma and Qabla An Yamūt, all depict nothing but individual anomalous situations that are unrelated to the Libyan environment despite al-Tikbālī's attempts to link them with it either through names or simple descriptions of places. Nevertheless, the characters themselves present a problem in that no organic connection exists between them and the overall social backwardness from which the society suffers. It would appear, therefore, that the main artistic feature of these and other stories remains his traditional one of non-critical realism. The plot unfurls slowly and there is no tangible development of events. In fact, we do not think the writer's choice of plot is an appropriate one and can sense his inability to bind the action together properly and to concentrate on situations that would have a stimulating and provoking effect.

1. Ibid, p.21.

To a certain extent, the foreign female characters in the above-mentioned stories have a degree of freedom and liberty that is overly exaggerated by the writer and the contrast is evident when he depicts the Libyan woman as a person whose spirit is utterly crushed and defeated, as in Kalām al-Nās.⁽¹⁾ Here, the story unfolds in the traditional way, through its characters and its various situations, and with a beginning, middle and end. However, we are made patently aware that the events depicted depend upon the author, by means of his central character, giving an individual solution to the problems dealt with; he also underscores the extent of the effect that the social environment has upon the individual. However, al-Tikbālī economizes in his description of the female character while applying himself to a lengthy and detailed statement in regard to the youth and the rumours he weaves about the girl when she refuses to marry him. Nevertheless, he does manage to shed light on the father's character from a psychological point of view, on his inner struggle between giving his daughter permission to further her education and bearing the criticism of his neighbours in allowing a female to be educated. The writer presents his different characters and the issue of women's

1. Khalīfa al-Tikbālī, Al-A^cmāl al-Kāmila, pp.163 pp.

education in a general way yet crams the story full of details that fail to serve any artistic objective. There is no internal or organic link holding the action of the story together and thus we are presented with an arbitrary solution when the father kills first his daughter and then his wife who had tried to defend her. The story is structured on the basis of a problem set out in narrative form but with a fabricated solution. The opinion of the youth, Salīm, that a basic or primary education is enough for a woman, is directly given at the beginning of the story. However, al-Tikbālī fails to deal with this problem or to treat the subject-matter and the events in an intellectually or artistically mature manner.

Through copious reading of the writer's work, one can sense al-Tikbālī's loyalty and attachment to his social class and to the way of life of its people. For this reason, one can say that some of the characters in his stories, particularly the children, are living people in his mind and in his emotions for they are usually found to be existing in harsh and miserable circumstances, the self-same conditions suffered by the writer. This is evident, for example, in Al-Budhūr al-Dā'i^{Ca} (The Lost Seeds),⁽¹⁾ the

1. Ibid, pp.71 ff.

story of a gang of youths who plan to rob people in the street after midnight. The writer then turns his attention to the divorce of the mother of one of the boys and the ill-treatment she had received at the hands of the father, pursuing the line that the reason for a child's delinquent ways can most often be laid at the door of a broken home. In Hikāyat Kidhba (Story of a Lie),⁽¹⁾ the author resorts to the same technique of arbitrary resolution of the problem presented in the story. There is no doubt that the writer exaggerates the thought processes of the child when thinking about his mother and her behaviour - the child's ideas are well beyond his stage of mental development.

The short story entitled Tamarrud⁽²⁾ illustrates the revolt of a young man against all the constraints imposed upon him by his family and perhaps the writer sees himself in the young man. There is hardly any dialogue, the writer concentrating on the events in narrative form - this seems to be a superficial way in which to tackle this subject for no profound treatment is given to these family and social problems.

Generally speaking, it cannot be argued that al-Tikbālī's

1. Ibid, pp.93 ff.

2. Ibid, pp.7 ff.

work is indicative of good art. His excessive detailing blurs the artistic vision which ought, normally, to distinguish the work of art and give it its authentic individuality. Al-Tikbālī deals with matters which he believes are worthy of attention and will arouse people's interest but he tackles them in such a monotonous way because he is, in fact, possessed of a very limited artistic sensibility. His stories lack the spirit of adventure, boldness, and the pursuit of new dimensions, especially those of a positive kind pertaining to the personality of women. He derives some of his stories from reality without finding that objective balance which creates a more profound and deeply-felt experience. As we have said, the Libyan environment is missing in certain stories and the mark of Libyan society is, therefore, lacking; this, in contrast to Al-Miṣrātī who, in his writings, provides a detailed and clearly-defined picture of Libyan life, even down to giving the names of streets and alleyways. So, too, al-Miṣrātī gives sufficient information about the houses in the neighbourhood together with the general domestic and outside atmosphere and, thus, conveys the distinctive Libyan environment. On the other hand, al-Tikbālī lacks these features of the Libyan personality and of Libyan life.

In Inqaddimlak Ukhtī Su^cād,⁽¹⁾ already discussed, the writer uses the element of time in the traditional, linear way. No effort is made to crystalize the events in a convincing manner and al-Tikbālī fails to make use of the flashback, a technique which incorporates the past within the present through the character recalling past events. This technique enables the action to develop by means of the personal feelings and emotions that can be objectified without the need to resort to the traditional concept of time which this writer uses. His traditional method merely serves to turn the story into a collection of events or happenings devoid of modernity or suspense. The short story must have these latter elements in order for the writer to convey to his reader, as he must, an organically-linked development of events. At the same time, this will reveal the mental processes of the writer himself or of his characters. There is another factor in the story that should be discussed and that is the introduction by the writer of the heroine's mother as a new element in the storyline, something that serves not to enhance the structural cohesion but to increase the incoherence of the story.

1. Ibid, pp.125 ff.

Apart from the considerations mentioned above, we should also note that al-Tikbālī fails to realise the essence of the relationships in Libyan society. They are typified by the non-equality between men and women on the one hand, and that between individuals generally, on the other. It is for this reason that his stories are based on conjecture and he confuses social issues with his own personal experiences. In a study published in the 'Al-Sha^Cb' newspaper on the anthology **Tamarrud**, Fawzī al-Bishtī says:

When the author writes about a part of his life and when he really lives the events portrayed in his work, he will inevitably forget to concentrate on his objective and will sail into a vast abyss of enthusiasm that will force him to dwell overly on the moment he himself has experienced.⁽¹⁾

Inasmuch as al-Tikbālī has not made a deep study of human nature and lacks any clear vision as to the future, he expresses no contradiction or powerful tension between the present and the future that is envisaged. No clear factors or varying psychological stimuli motivate his characters and this indicates a simplification of human feelings and emotions, particularly those of women. His stories fail to render a faithful picture of people who are indeed suffering

1. Fawzī al-Bishtī, "Muḥāwala li Fahm Tamarrud", Al-Sha^Cb, 9th year, No.129 (September 1972), p.7.

and are victims of some crisis or other and, for this reason, we do not feel for and sympathise with them as we should, nor are we concerned about their welfare. This artistic flaw may be due to al-Tikbālī's own life inasmuch as no opportunity was offered to him to experience intellectual or literary development either in Libya or in Germany; perhaps he lacked real experience in the literary field for, after all, eight years is hardly sufficient time in which to gain intellectual maturity. This viewpoint accords with that of writer Khalīfa Ḥuṣayn Muṣṭafā:

Al-Tikbālī lived a short life full of misery and hardship. He wrote what he wrote in difficult and depressing circumstances. His lifespan was too short to afford him the chance to say all that he wanted to say and all that he felt deep-down.⁽¹⁾

It is noticeable that his story-endings are sometimes arbitrary and unrealistic. There are, on occasions, happy endings and in certain stories the woman who is forced by circumstances beyond her control to lead a deviant lifestyle finally meets a decent man who saves her from her pursuit. Rare indeed would be the female student or young girl who would possess the courage to initiate a dalliance with a member of the opposite sex and to send love letters. Rare

1. Khalīfa Ḥuṣayn Muṣṭafā, Dhākirat al-Kalimāt, p.124.

indeed would be the brother in Libyan society who would welcome his sister's love for a man and help her on the path to marriage. This is all so unrealistic and reflects characters faced with uncommon contradictions; yet, al-Tikbālī does illustrate many of the social ills such as poverty, ignorance, sickness and belief in magic and superstition. Above all, sexual frustration is a theme that runs through practically every one of his stories. However, the author fails to get deep inside his characters - Libyan society is inundated with social contradictions that emanate from old-established customs and traditions such as those pertaining to marriage rituals, divorce, love, passion, poverty and ignorance. They represent a legacy which modern society has inherited from past generations. Society still adheres to them and men exploit them for their own benefit. This is the social backdrop against which al-Tikbālī's stories proceed but, according to the main topic dealt with by the writer, one could argue that women in Libya suffer nothing but problems associated with love and sex - al-Tikbālī always portrays them on a passionate and emotional high. This is particularly evident in Wajh al-Jarīma,⁽¹⁾ Qabl An

1. Khalīfa al-Tikbālī, Al-A^Cmāl al-Kāmila, pp.47 ff.

While the emphasis in stories written by Ahmad al-Faqih is on romance, al-Tikbālī concentrates on the sexual aspect of male-female relationships, as in the context of love, and particularly in connection with foreign women. Sulaymān Kishlāf says about the portrayal of sex in al-Tikbālī's work:

Overwhelming attention is given to the aspect of sex among Libyan citizens in some of al-Tikbālī's stories; not as a means to an end but as an end in itself.⁽⁴⁾

This perceptive remark is justified by the analysis which I have been attempting of the basic structural weaknesses of al-Tikbālī's work. What matters in the short story, as a literary work of art, is that the various attitudes and feelings should be objectively sanctioned in the sense that their presentation should be part of the texture of the story itself.

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1. Ibid, pp.282 ff.

2. Ibid, pp.33 ff.

3. Ibid, pp.15 ff.

4. Sulaymān Kishlāf, Dirāsāt fī al-Qiṣṣa al-Lībiyya al-Qaṣīra, Tripoli (1979), p.184.

CHAPTER V

YŪSUF AL-SHARĪF

(A) Short Introduction

Born in 1937, Yūsuf al-Sharīf's initial literary effort Laylat al-Dukhla (The Wedding Night) was published in the Libyan magazine, Tarābulus al-Gharb in 1959. His first anthology of short stories, **Al-Jidār** (The Wall), appeared in 1965 and won the Prize for Literature offered by the Supreme Council for Sponsorship of Literature and the Arts in 1965. The collection comprises 15 short stories, the majority of which, according to Amīn Māzin⁽¹⁾ were written before 1962. The reader of these stories will very soon discover an important fact: the close ties the writer has with the area around the main thoroughfare in Tripoli where he spent his childhood and youth.

The second collection of short stories, **Al-Aqdām al-^cĀriya** (Barefoot) appeared in 1974 and gives a clear picture of the same district and the writer's experiences there. In

1. Amīn Māzin, "Ra'y fī Majmū^cat 'al-Jidār'", Al-Ruwṭād, No.7, 1966.

these stories, al-Sharīf addresses himself to much of the existing social phenomena, and in his portrayal of women he deals both with the nature of the growth of affectionate relationships between men and women as they have developed within the constraints of certain rigid concepts governing the position of women, and with the family relationship in Libyan society, conveying a view of the contradictions that prevail among the inhabitants of the thoroughfare together with the different concepts and values held by members of the middle class. His stories reflect the images, imprinted on his memory during his childhood days, of the society he lived in. It would appear that al-Sharīf's own experiences represent the main pivot around which nearly all his stories revolve and one discovers the same names recurring time and again in most of them. He deals with and debates the issues facing these good but poor people with a kind of realism that does not, however, throw sufficient light on the problem of women's emancipation.

In his eyes, the woman suffers under the subjugation of man, the dominant sex. She is a victim of both man's authority over her and of an oppressive society, her personality having been utterly crushed and subdued; she now faces a fierce battle against the social backwardness that

has been generated by widespread ignorance and poverty while men, for their part, have no realization of the problems with which women have to contend. To a certain extent, the stories give a true impression of the author's social environment since he draws on the special character, features and daily happenings of Libyan life. In addition to the problems facing women, he deals with the problems of simple people, of the hopes and sorrows that fill their private worlds.

However, the heroines of Yūsuf al-Sharīf's stories live in a shut-off world from which there is no escape, constrained to move within the confines of narrow-minded concepts and an overly conservative attitude towards love and affection. The author makes woman prey to feelings of loss, failure, deprivation and poverty. His heroine is, most of the time, embroiled in a fight against authority, as in his story Al-Sūq (The Market),⁽¹⁾ in a struggle against the norms and traditional ways of her society, as in Al-Bint Kaburat (The Girl Grew Up),⁽²⁾ and against religious leaders who impart an extremely distasteful impression of

1. Yūsuf al-Sharīf, Al-Aqdām al-^CĀriya, Al-Dār al-^CArabiyya l-il-Kitāb, Libya (1978), pp.69 ff.

2. Yusūf al-Sharīf, Al-Jidār, Al-Sharika al-^CĀmma l-il-Nashr wa al-Tawzī^C wa al-I^Clām, 2nd.ed., (1979), pp.65 ff.

the male sex, an impression which creates psychological problems for her and drives her into a world of loneliness, helplessness and loss, as in Al-Bāb al-Akhdar (The Green Door).⁽¹⁾

However, Al-Sharīf conveys the effects of a social phenomenon without mentioning the underlying factors that cause it. With his narrative style, he may sometimes deviate from the realm of artistic language in the story, but he does bring one very close indeed to the nature of the moral lesson which he wishes to impart to the reader. The religious leaders, in these stories, have, for various reasons, lost contact with their world and have entered a self-imposed pseudo-religious isolationism, adopting the faith and religious rites in order to disguise not only their identities but their own physical and mental frustrations. Whatever form their isolation takes, whether self-imposed or brought about by external factors, the end result has nothing at all to do with religion in the true sense of the word. Yūsuf al-Sharīf, therefore, focuses severe criticism upon religious hypocrisy.

1. Yūsuf al-Sharīf, Al-Aqdām al-^cĀriya, pp.87 ff.

(B) Women's Marginal Role and Alienation

It is arguable that al-Sharīf's stories do not deal comprehensively enough with all the contradictions in the life of women despite his obvious sympathy for their plight. His writings do not furnish a complete picture of the life women lead, their anxieties and upsets, and the struggles they must face up to, not only in society, but in themselves and in family life. They fail to deal with the true dimensions of the problems met by the Libyan woman in her struggle between the old ways and the new inasmuch as Al-Sharīf neglects to show what she is really experiencing in the face of new ideas disseminated in the field of women's emancipation. Yūsuf al-Sharīf, like others, looks at the issues only superficially and ignores, or forgets, the real dimensions of the problem; or, perhaps, is guarded about analysing women's mental attitudes. The fact is that, in all his stories, al-Sharīf does not write about a single woman who is experiencing an inner struggle over the need for change and reform vis-a-vis society's false values, or who demonstrates the concern and fear felt by women in their lives. What he does actually do is to record the maltreatment of wives by their husbands and the ease with which divorce is obtained.

Al-Sharīf's stories elicit from the reader an immediate reaction. For Al-Sharīf, women play only a marginal role in society, that environment in which man alone is allowed absolute happiness. Women either find themselves being pursued by men if they happen to be beautiful, the man's carnal instincts being aroused as a result of both psychological and social frustrations and of inherited customs, traditions and values; or else women are exploited by the opposite sex in different ways, men who adopt a disdainful and bullying attitude towards them. The woman, forever that alien creature in man's society, is also a stranger to herself. One cannot find in al-Sharīf's writings a complete and comprehensive picture of the moral struggle that is taking place against the contradictions in society. When he tries to tackle that subject in certain of his stories, he affords it only a superficial treatment. Most of the stories in **Al-Jidār** revolve around love but his love is not a portrait of a pure, romantic relationship; it is the kind of love that simply cannot develop on its own in an overly imaginative person who is taken with dream-like infatuations. It is a love born of the struggles in life, linked to and inter-acting with all manner of social phenomena. It is this relationship that forms the basis of

most of the stories.

The first story in the anthology Al-Jidār is Hikāya Can al-Ḥubb (A Story of Love).⁽¹⁾ The main character, Manṣūr, is a dustman who loves the most beautiful girl in the district, a young girl the writer describes as a 'kitten' who, stealing a glance from behind a door, throws a box of rubbish outside the house. It is as if, with his story of Manṣūr's love for a girl from a middle-class family, al-Sharīf wishes to describe the struggle of the individual against materialistic and social traditions. He arouses feelings of isolation, weakness and frustration vis-a-vis outmoded and prevailing customs in the society. The author describes how Manṣūr has daydreams in which he sees himself as no longer unhappy and isolated but a full member of society. However, Manṣūr returns to his lost and introvert state when he discovers that the one he loves has become engaged to another man.

Al-Sharīf pays no attention at all to the potential aspects and dimensions which could be shown with regard to the problems facing the Libyan woman, neither does he concern himself with seeking appropriate solutions based on a change in social structure and a revaluation of the

1. Yūsuf al-Sharīf, Al-Jidār, pp.7 ff.

concepts extant in Libyan society. In other words, these stories, as we shall see later, pay no heed to the value of a closer understanding of a woman's personality. This means that for al-Sharīf, women live permanently in the shadows and have no idea of their true potential. In Hikāyat Can al-Ḥubb, this is the picture given of the feminine role:

اذ انفتح باب حوش الصادق المواجهه لـدكان
 عمران بما يسمح لخروج أنسان بصعوبة ، وأظلت
 " نجمة " بنت الصادق وبحركة سريعة تعودت عليها
 كثيرا ، مسحت بعينيها جهتي الشارع ثم قدفت بيديها
 مـندوق الغظ لـات
 واختفت .

Behold! The door of al-Ṣādiq's house, opposite Umrān's shop, opened narrowly allowing a person to come out, albeit with difficulty. Nujayma glanced about and, in a quick motion to which she was much used, she surveyed the sides of the street and threw out the rubbish bin with both hands before disappearing.⁽¹⁾

This story clearly demonstrates how tradition still strictly controls the life of the female sex, how women are so totally isolated from society. The result of this has been two-fold: women have lost all sense of personal ambition, and have become weak creatures living with just their memories and their sorrows, lonely inside the house,

1. Ibid, p.12.

behind the wall and the stout barricades that have been imposed upon her. However, there is practically no concrete description in this story of the woman's personality. We have to search for that ourselves, as far as we can, by means of certain incidental pointers given in the conversation that goes on between Manṣūr and a group of friends in the shop where they meet. Manṣūr's social circumstances and the extent of his fondness for Nujayma tell us that his affection is no more than an impetuous feeling prompted by inherited impulses and he feels frustrated, anxious and isolated due to the class barriers that exist between him and the girl. This personality upset of Manṣūr's has no clear connection with a critical review of the reforms required in Libyan society. Although al-Sharīf describes Manṣūr as having a deep attachment for Nujayma, yet he provides him with another attitude, a negative one, after he finds out that Nujayma has become engaged to another, a fact that concerns him not at all.

The writer has structured the story in such a way as to attempt a conciliation in society between the wealthy classes and the poor but he does so in a didactic context and with an idealistic moral outlook. Manṣūr is a simple dustman captivated by the beauty of a girl he sees in the

street. For him, she represents moral values that are not to be found in the girls of his own class, a symbol of sympathetic and fine emotions; Manṣūr proceeds on the assumption that he should reject society's traditional ways. What the writer wishes to emphasize is that human happiness is founded upon the values of love and goodness and has nothing at all to do with class or material distinctions. Throughout the story, al-Sharīf is trying to demolish the prevailing beliefs that reinforce a distinction between the rich and the poor. He presses home the fact that a person's true status is dependant upon his moral values and not upon any class position, i.e. the social contradictions are not presented in a convincing or sufficiently dramatic vein.

Al-Sharīf is calling for an improvement in the status of Libyan women in the educational field, in the home, in their relationship with men; he is also asking for a reassessment and relaxation of the control that different traditions have over their lives, traditions which shut them up behind walls. He draws the personality of a woman as nothing more than that of a perplexed being who has no involvement with society at large. It is not to be doubted that, in theory, al-Sharīf believes the short story must deal with the issues in today's society, e.g. social misery,

the terrible hardships in just getting by and the shift in moral values. Indeed, the writer tries to show how different traditions and concepts have themselves helped to corrupt society. Nevertheless, he does not delve into the roots of the problem or really examine the inconsistencies that exist. Consequently, his stories are not structured, in the main, in such a way as to invoke a positive role for women in Libyan society. Like other Libyan writers, he fails to draw close to the woman's world and the despicable controls that traditional society imposes upon her in order to govern her relationship with men. One cause of society's subjugation of women in this respect could be the long-standing religious and artificial social constraints visibly demonstrated in some of the stories. Al-Bāb al-Akhḍar (The Green Door),⁽¹⁾ for example, concerns a woman of ill-repute but the accusing finger pointed at her is by no means a clean one. Her very own clients are in the front ranks of those besieging her house in an attempt to evict her. Sheikh Misbah is standing in the crowd in front of the woman's house. Likewise, Hājj Ḥusayn is there in the forefront of those determined to expel her notwithstanding

1. Yūsuf al-Sharīf, Al-Aqdām al-ʿĀriya, pp.87 ff.

that he was one of her regular customers. However, both his secret and his false dignity are exposed there and then in the street when she appears carrying her directory which lists him as a frequent and undercover visitor to her house:

بدأ الباب الأخضر ينفرج ببطء . وظهرت مريومه
وتعلقت بها العيون ... وقفت على عتبة الباب ترميهم
بنظرات فاحصة وكأنها تبحث عن شيء معين وعندما اصطادت
ميناها الحاج حسين الذي كان يحاول الاختفاء بين
الاجساد .. اتجهت نحوه وراى الجميع مسبحة من العاج
تتلا تلف معصمها ثم تضمها في كفها الابيض وكانما
تخش ان تسقط
منها .

The green door began to open slowly and Maryam appeared with all eyes riveted upon her . . . She stopped on the threshold, looking at them with searching eyes as though seeking something; when she caught sight of Hājj Ḥusayn trying to hide himself in the crowd, she walked towards him, and all the people saw the glistening ivory rosary, wound around her wrist. She then seized it with the white palm of her hand as if she were afraid of dropping it.⁽¹⁾

Some of al-Sharīf's stories, in both collections, do not condemn the individual in society when he is prey to prevailing systems. Instead, he condemns society itself and the social changes that fail to take the individual into account. In Al-Sūq (The Market)⁽²⁾ we get a very human

1. Yūsuf al-Sharīf, Al-Aqdām al-Āriya, p.94.

2. Ibid, p.69.

glimpse of the life of the poor after the discovery of oil and the subsequent economic and social changes that take place. However, the continuing period of economic change does not lead to a change in social and moral attitudes. The author describes the main character, an old lady, who is carrying a large basket on her head as she heads for the souk as usual to sell her goods. In front of the souk, she is confronted by a policeman who forbids her to enter - the souk has become a supermarket and this means that simple vendors like herself are not wanted on the premises. She is refused entry inside the market, a symbol of economic prosperity. The policeman stands in front of her and throws her lecherous looks:

حبكت الفراشية حول جسدها كما كانت تفعل ايام
شبابها واكتسحت سحننها بلون ترابي .. اختلطت
دموعها بعرقها ثم تجرات وتقدمت خطوة الي الامام،
واصطدمت عينها بالحارس يقف امامها متمديا
وقد انفجرت شفتاه عن ابتسامة لئيمة -
تجاهلت نظراته التي كان يلمع منها بريق شيطاني يخفى
وراءه رغبة ..

She drew her outfit tight around her body as she used to do in the days of her youth and her face turned gray. Her tears mixed with her sweat; she took courage and moved a step forward, her eyes glaring at the guard standing before her, ready for an encounter. His face revealed a wicked smile. She ignored his look which shone with a devilish glimmer that housed real desire.⁽¹⁾

1. Ibid, p.69.

The writer is using evocative language which, in some ways, cannot find an easy equivalent in English. The meaning of "taṣaddā", in this context, is far more complex than "encounter". In Arabic, it suggests such emotive associations as are related to interception, going out of one's way to challenge or attack somebody, or assaulting somebody from a position of strength. Similarly, the Arabic word "infajara" is, of course, emotively much stronger than "reveal a smile".

In a bid to defend both her rights and her honour, the old lady protects herself by digging her teeth into the policeman's flesh. This episode serves to condemn society in its perception of a social problem, namely the isolation of women in society and the denial of their natural rights. Al-Sharīf registers this but does not look into the real causes of the problem, does not turn his attention to the underlying structure of society. We find that the old lady is baffled at being chased by men wherever she goes. Notwithstanding her age, men throw her bestial looks. She, like all of al-Sharīf's female characters, is lost in a world whose character and dimensions are not clearly delineated and she knows not how to escape from it. The old lady plants her teeth into the policeman in order to hurt

him, giving no thought to the military costume that represents the law: a man's law against women, a law which exploits a woman who uses her teeth to defend herself in a situation in which she cannot exploit her own body (unlike the woman in the previous story Al-Bāb al-Akhdar⁽¹⁾ as a device to find herself a place among a society of men. However, the writer invokes a feeling of regret and compassion for the old lady at the market in order to emphasize the connection between society's guilt on the one hand, and the alienation of women on the other. At the same time as the male characters of his stories come to realise they are in a true struggle with the real world in every way and are thus prompted to defend themselves in a manner that would all but serve as a justification for their actions by appealing to social motives, so, too, do the female characters experience a real problem in struggling with social reality, lost and alienated as they are and not finding the escape they seek.

The writer locates many psychological and social impulses in the lives of his characters. He illustrates the anxiety that surrounds marital relationships due to material, social or physical circumstances. It may be that the changing

1. Yūsuf al-Sharīf, Al-Aqdām al-^cĀriya, pp.87 ff.

psychological stirrings which the writer describes in a person are founded, as much as anything, upon a person's attitude towards external conditions and the distinctive traits found in a personality. The writer provides us with a detailed perspective of the lives of his characters in his description of psychological struggle. In Al-Shay' alladhī Ḥadath (The Thing That Happened),⁽¹⁾ he draws a picture of marital infidelity that disrupts the domestic peace and causes terrible distress to the husband because he feels himself incapable of having a physical relationship with his wife, a factor that has clearly upset the balance between the couple. Al-Sharīf does not deal with the question of sex in the obvious way al-Tikbālī does in his description of pent-up desires - he deals with the issue quietly and calmly, treating it as a form of escape from a world of gloom and depression. The heroine of the piece revolts against her position in the home; whatever love there was has died and her tragic unhappiness is the cause of the awful struggle within her. Her life has become one of intolerable isolation, caught between doubt and confusion.

The events in this story revolve around the wife, mother of two children, who asks her husband to let her attend a

1. Yūsuf al-Sharīf, Al-Jidār, pp.91 ff.

wedding. The wife is, however, late in returning home; she has not been to a wedding at all but has been unfaithful with another man due, perhaps, to the lack of physical harmony between herself and her husband or to other reasons such as the difference in their ages, although the writer does not make the reason clear. This is one of the writer's faults in that he neglects that completeness of detail which gives credence to a story as a work of art. The wife's unfaithfulness tells us that she is a person whose husband has, perhaps, been unable to satisfy her as a woman and who has, therefore, developed a need to find affection from another man. In the following passage, we listen to the suffering she is having to live with:

أية فكرة دفعتها إلى أن تكذب عليه وتدعي
 أنها ذاهبة إلى عرس بنت خالتها ؟ صحيح أن حياتها
 معه كانت شاقة ، وأن أياماً طويلة —————
 على الأسرة قاست —————
 جوعاً لا يرحم .

What idea had prompted her to lie to him and pretend she was going to her cousin's wedding? It was true that life with him was difficult and that so many days had gone by for the family, days in which she had felt an unremitting hunger.⁽¹⁾

We can feel the sense of loss and frustration suffered by the characters as a result of the spiritual and physical

1. Ibid, p.96.

harmony that is missing between the husband and wife. The writer's use, in this context, of "jū^c la yarḥam" (literally, "hunger that shows no mercy") is apt and suggestive. We can see that the wife's attitude reveals a true understanding of her self-alienation. When her own deprivation becomes too much, she does not give in but takes the initiative to seek a divorce. For her, divorce is preferable even with the bitterness and loss that would result, the stigma and struggles she would have to face in society, because the problem of divorce is, in itself, one that proceeds from the self-same traditional practices that prohibited her from choosing her own life-partner. The feeling of guilt at being unfaithful to her husband prompts her to adopt a positive attitude in order to release herself from her own sense of alienation.

In this story, al-Sharīf embodies many of the psychological and social impulses in people's lives and, just as in any other story by him, we learn nothing about the wife after the divorce, the writer leaving her to wander aimlessly due to the impossibility of continuing in her married life - her loss is a mark of the close connection that obtains between one's psychological and emotional stirrings. It would appear that the unfortunate events of

this story were highly-charged from the outset, emanating from a complex social problem and taking place in response to an acute moment of psychological conflict. We note the sympathy the writer has for the woman, a sympathy that is reflected in the husband's love. Nevertheless, the story fails to reflect the dramatic struggle that is the true cause of her infidelity; the writer does not analyse the psychology of the unfaithful woman, neither does he take us into her inner world.

Most of his stories are not without a certain object lesson and this is a chief characteristic of his approach. In other words, he fails to realise that the moral value of art is not found in giving advice and sermonizing but in opening people's eyes. The predominance of this instructional aspect means that the writer has lost many of the artistic elements required in structuring a story. His advice and admonitions interfere in the presentation of the narrative and thus divest the story of the artistic essence. The writer is more concerned with the presentation of his story than with logical structure. The greater part of al-Sharīf's output reflects the anxieties and frustrations that run through our society. His female characters face up to the problem of traditional practices in a capricious fashion

and without being guided upon the right path.

Other aspects of marital infidelity and of marriage itself are dealt with including the ways in which Libyan women are exploited in Libyan society wherein men regard them as a commodity to be bought and sold. The story Al-Bint Kaburat (The Girl Grew Up)⁽¹⁾ illustrates this. The father wants to marry his daughter off to Maḥmūd who owns a car company; that is to say, he wants his daughter to get married simply for his own benefit and for clear material gain. It is these considerations that are taken into account in accepting or rejecting the husband. Meanwhile, the mother sees no distinguishing features in Maḥmūd that would make her relinquish her desire to marry her daughter Fawzia to a senior official who is wealthier than Maḥmūd and owns five villas and an important commercial enterprise. The story ends with the collapse of the parents' dreams, a pointer to a change of attitude vis-a-vis moral behaviour. Al-Sharīf is symbolizing an evaluation of existing social standards that allow a woman to be bought and sold. She is a victim of weak family behaviour and the story can be viewed as an appeal to give women the opportunity to choose their

1. Ibid, p.65.

own partners. The strongest indication of this is given at the end of the story when Fawzia wants to choose her own partner for herself:

وقبل أن ينعطف إلى الشارع المؤدي إلى عمله
رأى ما كان يؤمن إيماناً أدياً باستحالة حدوثه ..
كانت فوزية تمشي الهينا يرافقها شاب يحمل
عنها محفظتها وحديث طويل لاشك أنه ممتع
يدور بينهما ومدمته
المفاجأة .

Before he (the father) turned into the street leading to his work, he saw something he had never thought he would see happen: it was Fawzia strolling in a very relaxed manner in the company of a young man who was carrying her bag and talking a lot. It was no doubt an enjoyable talk they were having and he was utterly taken by surprise.⁽¹⁾

Al-Sharīf wishes to underline the fact that life has begun to dispense with the old ways that were forever creating crises of conflict, and to stress the psychological and emotional instability that is a major factor influencing the disintegration of the emotional relationships that bind the individual and society together. Fawzī al-Bishtī comments on the concept of love in the **Al-Jidār** anthology, saying:

1. Ibid, p.72.

Love in the anthology "al-Jidār" is an indication of the sterility and barrenness of life. It is an assertion of the need for positive social relationships and deep psychological bonds.⁽¹⁾

If we look back for a moment and compare the way women are portrayed in the stories of Aḥmad al-Faḡīh to their portrayal in the writings of his successor, al-Tikbālī, we can see that Aḥmad al-Faḡīh concentrates on those features found solely in romantic stories and which describe a class of women who are isolated from other classes of women and who live in an independent world. In his writings, it is love, sentiment and a boisterous lifestyle that prevail. His stories are full of negative and frustrated characters. Likewise, fate and unexpected turns of event together with an overall feeling of individuality all play a major role in his stories.

Al-Tikbālī's stories, whatever their concern with different subjects, whatever the choice of characters representing human nature in Libyan society, fail to reach the depths of that nature or delve into and examine the characters' personalities. The writer mixes their feelings and sentiments with his own and with those of his readers

1. Fawzī al-Bishtī, "Al-Ḥubb fī Majmū'at 'Al-Jidār'", Al-Ruwād, No.2, Tripoli (1967).

such that the latter remain unaffected by the attitudes and situations he puts forwards. The reason for this is the use of an excessive imagination that has little to do with the real world. His portrayal of women is that of a pale and colourless creature who has no well-defined features. Anyone who undertakes a study of al-Tikbālī's works will discover that they are stories which concentrate on a group of people isolated from other classes as if there were no mutual involvement or inter-action between them. There is much dependence on excessive sexual impulses more than anything else. Even when some of his female characters are foreign, they, too, feel frustrated unless there is a man in their lives.

Al-Sharīf's stories, on the other hand, represent the beginnings of realism, albeit an uncritical realism. In Suwaylima⁽¹⁾ we can feel the pulse-beat of sensitive feelings and emotions within the framework of old customs and traditions. The love that binds the hero, Fathī, to the heroine has little to do with superficial infatuation or romantic fantasies. The gist of the story is that Fathī and Suwaylima live in the same house. This casual reference by al-Sharīf explains the economic and social conditions of the

1. Ibid, pp.133 ff.

country inasmuch as more than one poor family is living under the same roof and this particularly holds for an area of the old city wherein the majority of the writer's stories take place. Fathī's love is of the traditional kind, going no further than the exchange of glances or, perhaps, a few simple words. Fathī is very concerned at the mental strain from which he is suffering due to the hatred he bears for his father, a stern and severe taskmaster. To a certain extent, while he hates his father, yet there is a strong bond between them. The story deals with this inconsistency and we can feel the mental anguish suffered by Fathī. The main theme that runs through this story is the position of fathers towards their sons in situations that embrace emotional ties between a man and a woman. Love, here, is not that romantic, dream-like relationship sought by young men during adolescence. It is, instead, a clear and patent expression of an overall situation of crisis that exists in society. It is this aspect that draws the reader's attention, to a great extent, to Yūsuf al-Sharīf's work.

The reality of al-Sharīf's characters in his stories is not based upon idealism but it serves as a model that is representative of whole sectors of society; his characters reflect not only the individual's existence but also that of the real world or age in which they lived. However, his

characters tend to be burnt-out as human beings when the model to be taken is a woman. There is a further aspect of the relationship between men and women, one that is to be seen in the possessive instinct. For example, in Al-Shay' al-Khafī (The Hidden Thing),⁽¹⁾ the wife asks her husband, Sheikh Bil^ḥid, for a divorce after she has endured intense mental strain prompted by much of her husband's behaviour, behaviour that has been destroying her feelings of importance as a wife. In traditional society, a woman is always an object of humiliation when she fails to give birth to children even if it is the husband who is sterile. However, that is something no man would ever admit to. In this story, the husband is one of those religious types who are prepared to exploit religion in society. The husband has many things on his mind and is always on the point of making a decision. He is taken with admiration for a female neighbour, Zaynūba, it being important to note that this admiration of his is founded upon purely carnal desires and not upon the wish to have children - in other words, upon the possessive instinct.

He admires the whiteness of Zaynūba's complexion, her eyes, her charm. Why, then, does he not marry her,

1. Ibid, pp.93 ff.

especially as his wife is nearly forty years of age? The Sheikh even provokes his wife, reminding her about children, about friends and acquaintances who do have offspring, although the wife tries to control her feelings; there is so much suspicion and evil thought in the mind of the Sheikh. "Divorce me, divorce me", she says, and these words come as a bolt out of the blue for the Sheikh.

وانتفضى الشيخ بلعيد وسلط عليها نظرات بلهاء ..
وكان هذا آخر ما يتوقعه .. ولم يتكلم .. ولكنه
أخرج مسبحة وأخذ يفركها بين أصابعه بقوة ..
وكانما يود لـ يحط بها

Sheikh Bil^cid jumped to his feet and stared at her stupidly. It was not what he had expected . . . He did not speak but took out his rosary and rubbed it hard between his fingers as if he wished to break it. (1)

Here, al-Sharīf is using the theme of the weakness of woman and the strength of man, not by means of a developed outlook but from the point of view of what actually is, or in a realistic way that exposes the symptoms (unhealthy) of Libyan society. He highlights many social truths, particularly in his description of the separate psychological states of the man and wife. The woman prefers

1. Ibid, pp.63-64.

to remain silent and has no intention of retaliating with the fact that she knows everything going on inside her husband's mind. He uses the lack of children as a powerful weapon with which to threaten his wife and she must, therefore, accept whatever solutions to situations are imposed upon her by the husband. Then the Sheikh himself is stunned when his wife asks for a divorce and it is this that represents the transition between the old ways and the new.

The character of the wife in this story is reiterated in the wife in Al-Qitta (The Cat)⁽¹⁾ who refuses to accept the behaviour of her husband, a continual and never-ending source of torment for her. When her husband returns one night in a drunken state she refuses to share the bed with him. The husband becomes angry and beats his wife with his cane. The wife can find no way in which she, herself, can punish the husband so she leaves home. This arouses in the husband a deep awareness that he has behaved very wrongly indeed. It is as if the writer wants to say that beating one's wife is an outmoded solution and is no way to properly solve a problem, that a man who presumes he has the freedom to do what he likes, even to strike someone, will make his wife submit to everything, including a beating.

1. Ibid, pp.107 ff.

The wife's decision to leave home emphasizes, indirectly, that married life must be governed by love, understanding and reciprocity. Love must represent something new and borrow nothing from outdated and erroneous notions. This, too, is a new concept that has recently emerged in Libyan culture, a culture that is currently in a stage of transition. The most beautiful thing in this story is the manner, expressed through the stream of consciousness technique, with which the husband demonstrates his feelings towards his wife.

ومرت دقائق تحمل توترا يكاد يمزق أعصابه ونظر
الى ساعته التي أهدتها اليه فطومة ليلة زفافهما وتشابكت
في صدره انفعالات واحاسيس .. شعر ازائها برغبة
شديدة في البكاء وسط الحجرة التي يذكره كل شيء فيها
بفطومة .. قميص النوم المعلق فوق السرير وجهاز الراديو
الذي وقف على الاذاعة الليبية .. كانت فطومة تصر على
سماعها دائما والكاترو الذي يذكره بسقوطها من فوق
الكرسي وهي تحاول تثبيت الكاترو
على الحائط .

The minutes passed and the tension increased, his nerves almost reaching breaking point. He looked at the watch which Faṭūma had given to him as a present on their wedding night. Strong emotions and feelings welled up inside him and he felt an intense desire to cry. Everything in the room reminded him of his wife: the nightdress hanging above the bed, the radio which was tuned into the State channel - his wife always insisted on listening to it. And there was the picture which made him recall the time she fell off the chair as she tried to fix the picture on the wall.⁽¹⁾

1. Yūsuf al-Sharīf, Al-Jidār, pp.110-111.

The story ends on a touch of true love when the curtain is pulled aside and a young child appears holding a small tray of food in his hands. "Aunt Faṭūma sent me with this breakfast for you." Thereupon, the husband is taken by regret and remorse and senses the love that his wife bears for him. Despite his intense pride, he is unable to hold back his tears.

In some of these stories, we can sense the positive role of the woman, expressing both her feelings and her anger, never confounding the two. She, because of her affections and her love of married life bears, with difficulty, the ever-present flaws in the husband which tend to dissolve the psychological ties that bind members of the same family. The woman would play a wonderful role in most of the stories were it not for the author's substantial defects, either from the artistic point of view in general, or because of the false conceptions that he allows himself to fall into.

(C) A Critique of His Literary Approach

We can, in all honesty, say that Yūsuf al-Sharīf has not allowed excessive emotion to colour his stories. The social relationships which the author has chosen to deal with are of a tense and strained kind. The majority of his stories

set out the factors that throw light on the nature of the tension that exists in these relationships. One such factor, an important one, is shown in the frustration of the marital relationship, seen clearly in the collection **Al-Jidār**. Albeit that this frustration in marital relationships is the factor upon which the author concentrates our attention, the relationship between fathers and sons is certainly no better.

However, the limited artistic ability of the writer has not allowed him to analyse these factors properly. He concerns himself only with the detailed aspects of life, presenting reality as it is among the lower-class areas, parts of the old city, and other over-populated districts. There is hardly any part of these stories in which we do not come face to face with detailed glimpses of life as it is in these areas, the writer depending, as he does, on facts and observations in our daily lives.

Al-Sharīf does not follow the style of al-Faqīh, nor that of al-Tikbālī who concentrates on sensuous and sexual instincts and feelings. He endeavours to work within a social framework or context of tense relationships. Al-Sharīf was once asked at a press reception launched by al-Ṣayd Abū Dīb in 1968 as to whether the stories in **Al-Jidār** inclined towards realism and whether he found the realist

school more appealing than any other artistic school. He replied:

We know that both the classical and romantic schools have disappeared and have no longer any real existence in view of the commitment to realism on the part of (Libyan) writers in the field of the short story and in other fields. The story-writer, the man of letters, the novelist and the poet are, of necessity, realists now . . . This realism is now a distinctive feature of the Libyan short story, I think.⁽¹⁾

One of the most important artistic features that shows in the anthology **Al-Jidār** insofar as literature as an art form is concerned is its lucidity of style and clarity of meaning and the fact that the reader can easily comprehend the thematic purport. From the point of view of subject matter, the stories deal with the same subject that finds favour with all Libyan writers contemporary with al-Sharīf, namely love. However, love has a special meaning for al-Sharīf. It is a love that does not surrender to known traditions. In **Al-Jidār**, love represents the fundamental link between a man and a woman. Love may come belatedly to a woman when she discovers that she is a stranger in her own home. She then goes over the wall (al-Jidār) of the house in search of

1. Al-Ṣayd Abū al-Dīb, "Hadīth fī al-Qiṣṣa al-Qaṣīra ma^C al-Adīb Yūsuf al-Sharīf", Al-Ruwwād, No.10, Tripoli, (1968), p.62.

that love. There are varied ways in which this love can be expressed. Perhaps one of the most important manifestations of it is the struggle between the law and responsibilities on the one hand, and freedom and release from legal constraints on the other. In the majority of the stories, both in **Al-Jidār** and **Al-Aqdām al-^cĀriya**, this struggle is one between the heart and the mind.

Notwithstanding that al-Sharīf views his characters from within rather than from without, we find they suffer from closed minds in the stories, and it is this that represents the stumbling-block preventing their integration with others. There is a wall standing between a wife and her husband, between a son and his father, between colleagues of different sexes, between the individual and society. However, the struggle between the heart and the mind is the principal feature. For example, Al-Shay' alladhī Ḥadath⁽¹⁾ demonstrates the psychological struggle that emanates from marital infidelity. The wife is unfaithful to her husband and this creates feelings of guilt within her. It is in this situation of an unfaithful wife that we can see the strength of the conflict between the heart and the mind although no indication is given as to any pertinent social

1. Yūsuf al-Sharīf, Al-Jidār, pp.93 ff.

or psychological barriers. The wife's unfaithfulness was a means to prove a point, namely the frozen state of affairs between herself and her husband. We can sense a sort of dramatic attitude assumed by the characters in undertaking their different roles. They are characters whom we cannot hear clearly except through the narrator and this rarely allows them the opportunity to express themselves. As I have said, this story revolves around unfaithfulness. It is not a deliberate act of infidelity, rather an assertion of the severity and harshness of life. It could be prompted by other impulses, the most important being the fact that the wife finds no satisfaction in the married life that was imposed upon her. The circumstances of their marital relationship emphasize the permanent feeling the wife has, for a number of reasons, of living a life of subjugation. The writer uses the stream of consciousness technique in his description of the wife's return at a late hour, and shows us the psychological struggle that takes place in the wife's mind. When she returns home and cannot face her husband who is asking the reason for her lateness, she does not answer him and tries to forget what has happened. However, her feelings of guilt return, as we see in the following passage:

وحاولت جدها أن تنسى ما حدث، إلا أن
صوتاً يأتها من بعيد قوياً يكاد يمزقها ..
" كاذبة كاذبة " ويتلشى قليلاً ثم يعود مرة
أخرى أقوى مما كان .

She made every effort to forget what had happened. But a powerful voice came to her from afar, almost tearing her apart - "Liar" . . . It receded a little but then returned once more, stronger than ever.⁽¹⁾

The legal relationship cannot shield a family from break-up when one's heart surpasses the legal constraints. The reason for this is that modern woman wants to exercise her right to express her feelings, to refuse to recognise so-called laws usually founded upon her subjugation in society. The woman has so often been denied her rights, even that of choosing a husband for herself. When the law fails to constrain her and the wife is exposed to a strong and powerful wave of torment, we perceive another form of subjugation wherein the husband, having doubts about his wife's behaviour, will beat her. He does not let up from beating her until he feels his strength being sapped. Then, of a sudden, he hears his wife asking for a divorce.⁽²⁾ In this story, al-Sharīf shows us the mental disposition of the husband, forever anxious and upset awaiting his wife's

1. Yūsuf al-Sharīf, Al-Jidār, p.96.

2. Ibid, p.98.

return. It was the same during the times he had doubts about her behaviour. Yet, in spite of all this, we find the husband expressing his love for his wife indirectly when he tries to find a justification for his wife's rebellion. Notwithstanding the writer's use of the stream of consciousness technique and his attempt to bring us close to the state of mind of the characters in this story, they are devoid of any real movement based on dramatic tension or conflict. This is due to the inability of the writer to describe attitudes and events in an absorbing way. Even when there is a heart-rending or comparable situation, it is devoid of any dramatic effect.

As for the artistic features of his style, they are somewhat limited because of the reformist and didactic treatment he adopts in expounding the main theme of his story. It is obvious that the literary art form used here is of the traditional kind based, as it is in this story, on direct narrative. The author uses no modern artistic devices or forms as a means of conveying his vision of the man-woman relationship. However, his main fault is that he does not allow his characters the freedom to express themselves through the action itself. This is because al-Sharīf is constrained not only by an overly-narrational style but also by the traditional vein in which he expresses

himself. In his critique of **Al-Jidār**, Abū Dīb states:

You feel nothing to stir the heart. You follow the events in a story from "al-Jidār", and notice a certain coldness in the writing as I have previously said. There is a lack of depth in the ideas expressed. They are tantamount to remnants or images which were stamped on the mind of Yūsuf al-Sharīf during his childhood and youth - impressions and recollections of the district in which he lived.⁽¹⁾

With al-Sharīf, the short story does not go beyond the imparting of superficial information and he treats the events that take place simply as events. This is because the stories are confined within a narrow circle, bound by tradition and heritage, and because they lose out on many artistic elements, each story being closer to a reformist piece of writing than to an artistic piece of story-writing; this, notwithstanding that they retain some elements of the story in the idea expressed, in the narrative, in the characters and, from time to time, in the context of the events that take place. Al-Sharīf interposes himself in the characterisation and the narrative, sometimes obtrusively making himself one of the characters. He resorts to this device in order to take us deeper within the soul and personality of the characters. Although the thread that binds his various recollections together within the main

1. Al-Ṣayd Abū Dīb, "Khawāṭir Sarī^Ca", Al-Idhā^Ca, No.18, Tripoli (1966), p.2.

story-line appears a very tenuous one, and although the flow of the narrative and the addition of excessive detailing do not have a strong link with the main plot, which tends to weaken the story structure, yet they are stories that reflect many issues and events and draw their characters from real life. Some of the stories reflect the critical emotional reactions that persist between social groups. Whatever it may be, it is a real part of society that is more than just indicative. This is how it is in Al-Bāb al-Akhḍar,⁽¹⁾ and Al-Sūq⁽²⁾ from the Al-Aqdām al-^cĀriya anthology, and Fortūna,⁽³⁾ Al-Bint Kaburat,⁽⁴⁾ Al-Gharīb (The Stranger),⁽⁵⁾ Qahwa Sāda (Unsweetened Coffee)⁽⁶⁾ and others from Al-Jidār, all stories that deal with a diverse range of social topics.

One also notices a general feature that runs through the anthologies and that is the fact that the stories are distinguished by an anecdotal element i.e. that they are stories merely to be read and narrated. There is more

1. Yūsuf al-Sharīf, Al-Aqdām al-^cĀriya, pp.78 ff.

2. Ibid, pp.69 ff.

3. Yūsuf al-Sharīf, Al-Jidār, pp.15 ff.

4. Ibid, pp.65 ff.

5. Ibid, pp.83 ff.

6. Ibid, pp.115 ff.

concern with narration of the events that take place than there is with analysing them. The action is distinguished by anecdotal commitment to the time of the events, on the one hand, and with the raising of recollections on the other. There are two movements: an external one bound to the world of immediate experience and the present time, and an internal one bound to the psychological state of the characters and to the past. For example, in Qahwa Sāda,⁽¹⁾ we see the complete domination of direct narrative, a fact that renders the story nothing more than a tale devoid of any artistic contours and objective purport. The writer is attempting to create one beautiful moment in the middle of another, one apparently more comprehensive and more profound. It is that moment in which Ḥamm Sulaymān, the main character, stands up against society's constraints and tries not to make of himself a mere instrument serving social concepts he does not believe in. In Qahwa Sāda, the incompatibility is not between the internal and external worlds of the character, but between him and the traditional views held by society. The social environment has one outlook and he another. Ḥamm Sulaymān has married Nujayma who is about twenty years his junior. On the wedding night,

1. Ibid.

he finds out that another man has known his wife before him. He keeps this knowledge to himself despite it being a source of torment to him. The same day, Fāṭima, the saleswoman, manages to discover this secret from the wife and lets it out so that it very quickly becomes known throughout the entire district. Fāṭima is "tantamount to a news agency" and people's attitudes towards Ḥamm Sulaymān change. He faces this sudden change in an embarrassed silence - it threatens to destroy his married life. He says to himself, "Why don't they show some kindness?", "What do they want from me?"⁽¹⁾ The author, in this story, is not concerned with the social class to which his characters belong as much as he is with the situation itself. In Qahwa Sāda, there is not so much a main character as there is a situation, the situation that Ḥamm Sulaymān finds himself in with his neighbours while sitting in the coffee-shop. They are looking at him in a very strange way, such that he becomes aware of his alienation, especially when one of the coffee-shop staff approaches Sulaymān and says: "Divorce her, Sulaymān. God will compensate you."⁽²⁾ Sulaymān shouts

1. Ibid, p.123.

2. Ibid.

back loudly, "No, no! You are all like unsweetened coffee."⁽¹⁾ (What he means by this is that they have no compassion, for the taste of unsweetened coffee is tantamount to that of bitter tea).

In other words the incompatibility is between the present and the past. It is the struggle of the man and woman, of the man who loves his wife and is prepared to forget what happened in the past. Nevertheless, Sulaymān is torn apart when society bears down on him and life becomes one continuous struggle, a hysterical one in which he is immersed and which becomes a conflict between the heart and the mind. The present and the past are the standards by which we come to learn about people and their behaviour. However, the writer allows love to triumph when Sulaymān makes up his mind to defy his neighbours and maintain his love for his wife despite everything. Nevertheless, the psychological detachedness between himself and the local population is a major reason why Sulaymān leaves the district with his wife to head for an unknown destination, leaving behind his affiliation with his society, his birthplace, his people and his friends, all of whom represent attachment to the past. Meanwhile, Sulaymān has

1. Ibid.

come to believe that love represents the present and the future and all that one hopes and expects in life. The 'denouement' of the story is an individual one because in Sulaymān, when he takes the decision to depart, we can sense, despite the lack of indication to that effect, an overwhelming sense of loss. There is an intensification of the struggle and a widening of the breach between the individual and society despite this individual 'denouement' which is founded upon the assurance that love is one of the most important values to be upheld in the life of men and women both.

In the stories contained in **Al-Jidār** and **Al-Aqdām al-^cĀriya**, it is noticeable that the feeling of love intensifies within the characters at the expense of other feelings. The characters are, in the main, only defined in the sense that they have names. Rarely do they possess any well-delineated physical features; they are characters devoid of dimension. As to the social dimension, the characters depicted in both anthologies obviously belong in working-class circles. From the point of view of content, it mostly deals with the relationships existing between men and women, demonstrating aspects of love and friendship, of marriage, and of unfaithfulness in complex relations.

In Hikāya Qadīma (An Old Story),⁽¹⁾ there is an introduction, a familiar feature of al-Sharīf's work, in which he sets out for the reader, at great length and in great detail, the particular characteristics of the district and the customs and traditions that stand in the way of women's progress. Life follows a routine pattern and does not accept change. Fāṭima, the second female character in the story, resembles a number of girls who have been crushed upon the rock of tradition and held back by negative social constraints. However, after a few days, the main female character in the story, Umm al-Ḍafā'ir, causes social and psychological upheaval to this traditional lifestyle when she overcomes the difficulties and restrictions imposed upon her by the people in the district. The writer gives a clear and critical description of the two most significant male characters in the story, the Sheikh Mukhtār Sheikh al-Shāri^c and Hājj ^cAbd al-Salām, traditional in their behaviour and tied to the old ways. The main female character represents the young generation and the writer displays the events that take place as through a camera lens. In addition, he gives his own personal opinion and commentary on what is taking place. For instance, the commentary that he provides Hājj ^cAbd al-Salām who is sitting on his chair in front of his shop killing time talking about people and life in general.

The heroine of the piece captures the attention of everyone in the district, including the Sheikh, Hājj and the young men all of whom adopt different attitudes towards her. Yet, all of their conceptions and attitudes towards the girl are an expression of the social and physical frustration they all feel. The Sheikh asks the girl's father to clothe her in a veil. The father pays no attention to him. The Sheikh begins to spread rumours against the family in a bid to ruin the girl's reputation.

Al-Sharīf concentrates a number of characters into this story, all of whom have one aim - to get to know the girl. The writer is underscoring the fact that the absence of women in society, or in this particular district, is the main reason for these attitudes. The writer feeds the imagination of the adolescent-minded people of both, the old generation and the new, but without going deeply into the lives and psychological traits of the characters, without analysing the events and interpreting their behaviour. He makes no attempt to discover the motives, reasons or subconscious impulses, whether societal or personal, that have prompted their actions and makes no clear distinction between the different attitudes adopted by the old and new generations towards the problem of women. In other words, al-Sharīf fails to provide an objective treatment of the over-riding attitude towards women that is found in his

stories. For example, in this particular story, the youth of the district represent the future generation yet, in fact, they are a carbon copy of the old generation. In his criticism of **Al-Jidār**, Khalīfa Ḥusayn Muṣṭafā has this to say:

In "al-Jidār", Yūsuf al-Sharīf began a tradition of slow writing in which there is an over-indulgence of narrative and repetition until there is nothing more to say. The story ends and he has contributed nothing new, nor has he extracted any new conceptions.⁽¹⁾

In our criticism of al-Sharīf's work, we have to remember that the short story, ideally, requires a new moral approach that conveys a true vision of man, not as he is viewed in the accepted traditional sense; it does not require a rhetorical outburst against traditional ways, nor haphazard excursions towards a better life based mainly on empty slogans. The important thing is to present a moral vision in a subtle manner, not to moralize. Al-Sharīf has an unfortunate tendency to draw a succession of images and events. Rashād Rushdī, talking about the concept of the story, says:

1. Khalīfa Ḥusayn Muṣṭafā, "Al-Jidār wa Al-Aqdām al-^CĀriya", Al-Fuṣūl al-Arba^Ca, p.65.

The short story is not simply one or more pieces of information to be imparted. It is something which, of necessity, evolves out of a specific viewpoint and, again of necessity, develops to a specific point that gives consummation to the meaning of the story.⁽¹⁾

It is this artistic approach to the problems of literary creation which makes clear the fundamental weaknesses from which the work of al-Sharīf suffers. The meaning or moment of illumination to which Rashād Rushdī refers cannot be separated from the technical and formal elements with which we have been concerned.

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1. Rashād Rushdī, Fann al-Qissa al-Qasīra, Cairo (1959), p.137.

CHAPTER VI

LUTFIYYA AL-QABĀ'ILĪ

(A) Introducing al-Qabā'ilī

Perhaps what is most noticeable about any analysis of the social content in works by the female Libyan writers is that one is able to reach firm conclusions or viewpoints with regard to each of them. The solutions which they propound to the problems raised in their writings are based upon preconceptions of society. It is immediately evident that these preconceptions adhere to the works of the female writers and may help to reveal the nature of the Libyan woman's thinking with regard to established social phenomena and conditions and her search for solutions that will guarantee her a life of dignity and security within a new society. Such thinking applies to a large section of women in Libyan society and young women are always the weakest, the most deprived and submissive members of that society. Women clearly suffer from social pressures far more than do men and this is visible in the short-story anthology **Amānī Mu^callaba** (Pent-up Desires) by Luṭfiyya al-Qabā'ilī, published in 1983. It contains 27 short stories which give

clear and rapid impressions of women who are trying to escape from facing up to social reality; likewise, of their inability to reconcile the new attitudes and behaviour of the society to which they wish to adhere, and their subjection to the despotic and traditional rules of that society.

There is an ever-increasing pressure put on the woman in regard to the struggle between her heart and her mind, between subjection and refusal to submit whenever the woman attempts to free herself from tradition and inherited social constraints. She is caught in a vortex; on the one hand, she has the desire to work and act on her own initiative and, on the other, there is the social reality which forbids her freedom or liberation. For this reason, the women in al-Qabā'ilī's stories find themselves defeated at all levels. However, the writer is unable to personify clearly, through her characters, the journey the Libyan woman must make across historical and social constraints in her life. Nor is al-Qabā'ilī able to depict what goes on deep inside the woman, her struggle within. In the light of this, we do not feel that the writer properly expresses the woman's refusal to accept prevailing social conditions or the despotic control over her that renders her dependant upon

man. It is all these harmful elements that prevent the woman from asserting her individual existence, her potential and the positive contribution she can make to society. In these stories, we do not feel aroused in any way by the negative position of women. The writer fails to tackle the problems faced by Libyan women through the agency of real conditions to which they have been subjected in society throughout a long period of history and whereby the women of today are shackled to inherited customs and traditions.

In *Amānī Mu^Callaba*, Luṭfiyya Qabā'ilī deals with the problems facing Libyan women within a narrow and traditional framework which tends to highlight the common features found among the different stories, as if the writer is drawing upon a single experience and wishes to express similar and recurrent aspects all the time. Thus, the central theme around which the stories turn is the problem of women whose true feelings and sentiments are suppressed, in certain instances, by merciless traditions and family interests and, otherwise, by the harsh treatment meted out to her by the male sex. This leads to mental frustration on the part of the woman, for various reasons including divorce, infidelity, traditional marriage and polygamy. However, this frustration is portrayed by the writer as if it exists

in a vacuum because she does not outline an appropriate social framework, i.e. these stories contain nothing of what the English critic T.S. Eliot referred to as 'the objective correlative'. Her perspective is bound by certain ideas and recollections about love and man's abandonment of woman, ideas that do not sufficiently express the spirit of the age from the viewpoint of women, or, come to that, even of men. She fails to grasp the objective forces that motivate society. There are no clearly-defined concepts that would allow us to discover anything distinctive or tangible about any objective force in Libyan society, such as the class struggle, the concept of divorce under Islam and the problem of the working woman. Neither does the writer deal positively with the problems confronting the young Libyan woman at all times, particularly during a period of social and cultural change.

The Libyan historian and critic, Khalīfa al-Tillīsī, in his introduction to **Amānī Mu^Callaba**, says:

Are there not some aspects of weakness among the fair sex? Are women's problems confined to marital infidelity, living with the husband's family and being denied an education? . . . There are still many issues which one would expect the writer to deal with from a much broader point of view and a more artistic approach.⁽¹⁾

1. Khalīfa al-Tillīsī, Majmū^Cat Amānī Mu^Callaba, Introduction, pp.6-8.

(B) Her Literary Approach to the Portrayal of Women

From the artistic point of view, there is absolutely no plot in the majority of the stories, perhaps in all of them. They begin at the end of a particular situation, in most cases. There is no integrated dramatic action, merely intellectual notions or personal recollections. And because the artistic structure is weak, there being no beginning, middle or end in the Aristotelean sense, there are no moments of insight nor are any convincing conclusions reached. There is yet another artistic deficiency in that the fundamental stuff of the story is fashioned out of a style more akin to poetry than prose, the writer's approach being based upon association of ideas as in poetic language. It is as if the writer is exclusively interested in treating whatever she handles in such a poetic language without thereby creating new technical dimensions in the short story as an art form. In the story Amānī Mu^Callaba (Pent-up Desires),⁽¹⁾ in which the writer deals with past recollections, the central female character recalls memories of a past love and the relationship between them when she

1. Luṭfiyya al-Qabā'ilī, Amānī Mu^Callaba, Al-Sharika al-^CĀmma l-il-Nashr wa al-Tawzī^C wa al-I^Clām, Tripoli (1983), pp.61 ff.

discovered the man was already married at the time he wrote to her asking her to be his wife. The writer is here attempting to criticise the society that transformed her into a person who has nothing to live for but her memories. There is no real plot in the story in the accepted sense.

Thus, the woman suffers psychological defeat despite her modest attempts at revolt and facing up to things. This story is but one about Libyan women who refuse to knuckle under to men's authority or submit to the control of custom and tradition. One of the contemporary problems al-Qabā'ilī tackles is the question of divorce, as in Muṭlaqa (Free),⁽¹⁾ Jināzat Ḥubbī (The Funeral Procession of My Love)⁽²⁾ and Iltaqaynā (We Met).⁽³⁾ In this last story, the writer deals with her own personal experience of love, using her recollections as a means to indict society in regard to the divorce problem. Here, the wife is divorced by her husband who has gone on an educational mission to the United States. There he marries a young girl despite the fact that his first wife is still in love with him - that is of no concern to him at all. One day, the family receives the following

1. Ibid, pp.185 ff.

2. Ibid, pp.71 ff.

3. Ibid, 49 ff.

letter, one which reveals just how disdainful is the attitude of ordinary people towards the feelings of married women:

أنا بخير والحمد لله .. لقد رزقت ابنة جميلة
أسميتها سونيا .. عفوا فلأنا قد تزوجت منذ السنة
ونصف السنة .. أرجو أن تخبروا زوجتي بهدوء وحاولوا
ان تصفوا لها الأمور بتواد .. سأرسل اليها
ورقة الطلاق قريبا .

I'm fine, thanks be to God. I have been blessed with a beautiful daughter whom I have named Sonia. By the way, my new wife and I got married a year and a half ago. Would you please tell my wife about it gently and try to tell her how things are in a kind way. I will be sending her the divorce papers shortly.⁽¹⁾

This, then, derived as it is from the behaviour of Libyan society, illustrates the true status that women hold - that of second-class citizens; the echoes of her suffering resound under conditions which encourage female bondage and rob women of their natural rights. The story Jināzat Ḥubbī⁽²⁾ concerns a man who believes in the need to have children and he is the pivot on which the story hangs. He does not love his wife for herself but simply as a means to an end. Here, al-Qabā'ilī is attempting to expose some of the psychological and social elements in a woman's life as

1. Ibid, p.53.

2. Ibid, pp.71 ff.

she describes the anxiety surrounding the marital relationship because the wife loves her husband but she is sterile. The husband decides to marry again in order to have children and is very frank with his wife on the matter:

لابد أن أتزوج .. فأهلي يريدون لي أن أكون
أبا ، أمي المريضة يجب أن أرضيها .. يجب أن تحتضن
أطفالي وتتمتع بروعتهم .. لا تكوني أنانية وتحكروني
لنفسك .

I have to get married again . . my family want me to become a father . . my mother is sick and I have to agree to her wish. She wants to hug her grandchildren . . she wants to enjoy seeing them. Don't be selfish and want me all to yourself.⁽¹⁾

The wife in this story does not express clearly enough her refusal to accept the social standards that simply make her a means to an end. Like other stories by al-Qabā'ilī, this one ends as if it were calling for women to remain imprisoned within these flawed social constraints. It therefore indicates a lack of real imagination in dealing with social and psychological problems. Nor does it aim to provide an insight into, or make one think seriously about, the suffering and the real-life experience of women. The story fails to bring home the fact that divorce in a traditional society is tantamount to announcing the death-knell for women as members of society, especially in view of

1. Ibid, p.75.

the rigid social constraints imposed on a woman by others - principally, her family. The social environment does not allow the woman any opportunity to express herself or to realise herself as a human being.

There is a selection of stories dealing with the subject of unfaithfulness, such as Ghafartu Laka (I Forgave You),⁽¹⁾ Kalimat Sharaf (Word of Honour)⁽²⁾ and Al-Risāla (The Letter).⁽³⁾ In this last story, we find also that the writer treats women's problems in a superficial and metaphysical way in her description of an unfaithful husband who is having an affair with an Italian songstress. The singer sends him a letter asking him to visit her but when his wife asks him what is in the letter he says that it is to do with business and that he has been called away. The husband, overjoyed at receiving the letter, leaves the house to make the journey which takes him outside the city. The writer resorts to a solution akin to the "deus ex machina" which hardly appeals to reason in the modern world when she kills off the husband who dies while walking along a city street on his way home. At the end of the story, she

1. Luṭfiyya al-Qabā'ilī, Amānī Muḥllaba, pp.95 ff.

2. Ibid, pp.117 ff.

3. Ibid, pp.131 ff.

writes:

ولم يكن في حسابه أنها نهايته
الأبدية التي عجلت بها رسالة .

He did not expect that it would be the eternal end which the message had expedited.⁽¹⁾

The other stories all have a common theme, namely that a woman is still a slave to her passions and sentiments in spite of the affront to her dignity. In Ghafartu Laka, for example, the central female character is upset at first and tries to regain her dignity. Then, she very quickly allows her feelings to get the better of her and weaken her resolve when the writer, through the heroine, gives expression to romantic excursions, as if they were sacred hymns in the world of love:

وتتلاقى أعينهما في نظرات تحمل لكليهما علامات
الحب والرضى .. وتدرك أيضا أنها تحبه .. فتقرر
أن تطوي صفحة الماضي لتعيش من جديد بأمل
جديد وحب جديد .

Their eyes met and their looks conveyed the love and contentment that they felt. She realised, too, that she loved him . . . and she decided to bury the past and live again with new hope . . . and a new love.⁽²⁾

1. Ibid, p.137.

2. Ibid, p.99.

It is noticeable in most of the stories, when it comes to an analysis of the social content, that the writer's will deserts her; her female characters lack confidence in themselves, particularly when an important decision has to be made. Most of the stories depict the inability to face up to different situations that require the woman to take a decision. Likewise, they demonstrate the psychological disintegration from which al-Qabā'ilī suffers whenever a positive decision has to be taken, perhaps because she is not acquainted with the complex relationship that obtains between men and women and the effect that infidelity has on the mind of a woman together with the bitterness that she has to bear in her life. The writer is unable to express herself in a dramatic way when describing a woman's feelings on discovering that her husband has been unfaithful:

فتثور .. لا .. لن أفقر له .. أنه لا يستحق حبي
لقد حطم قلبي وخرج أنوثتي ولا بد أن أعيد
لنفسي إعتبارها .

She became furious . . No, I will not forgive him . . He doesn't deserve my love. He has broken my heart and hurt me as a woman . . I shall have to regain my self-esteem.⁽¹⁾

However, it is noticeable that this recalcitrance on the

1. Ibid, p.98.

woman's part is easily and quickly overturned and she forgives her husband, perhaps because she loves him so much. A state of instability exists between her heart and her mind. Consequently, the writer combines moments of happiness with those of sorrow without ever depicting the situation in a convincing and profound manner, as is also the case with Muqārana ṢaCaba (A Difficult Comparison)⁽¹⁾ and Kalimat Sharaf (Word of Honour).⁽²⁾ At the end of the story, the central female character in Muqārana ṢaCaba seeks solace and comfort in the Holy Koran in order to compose herself mentally after the terrible heartache she endured following her husband's infidelity. In Kalimat Sharaf, the woman exacts a promise from her husband that, on his honour, he will never be unfaithful again. All of this tends to give the reader the impression that most of the stories in the anthology are based solely on superficial experiences, devoid, as they are, of clear and profound ideas about women's true feelings and the sadness and sense of alienation they experience psychologically in such situations. They are stories that express assumptions about general attitudes in regard to the situation of women.

1. Luṭfiyya al-Qabā'ilī, Amānī MuCallaba, pp.101 ff.

2. Ibid, pp.117 ff.

There is no stimulating viewpoint put forward at all; the most significant and common characteristic of the stories is that they are simply passing thoughts and recollections in the writer's mind, as if she is in a capsule and remote from the struggle within the human being, and particularly within women, against conditions and circumstances that are seemingly more powerful. Most of the situations tackled by al-Qabā'ilī are incidental ones notwithstanding that there are many issues in Libyan society which need to be represented in an artistic form coupled with, at the same time, a much broader, more general, and deeper perspective. Issues such as these require a knowledge of the essential social struggles going on in Libyan society, conversance with Arab literary traditions in the field of the short story, and the ability to understand fundamental and extant contradictions in society and to personify them in characters who suffer the concerns and anxieties of the time in which they live. This is the most important aspect of literature that distinguishes the artistic and true-to-life works of the major writers (such as Laṭīfa al-Zayyāt in Egypt, for example) and which are missing from the work of Luṭfiyya al-Qabā'ilī.

We are arguing that Luṭfiyya Qabā'ilī holds traditional views in her conceptions of society and of art, and that her

language tends to be repetitive. This is, perhaps, due to her lack of interest in the formal problems of the short story. Often, she leans towards a poetic style more than towards prose, as in Jināzat Ḥubbī:

اننى نسيـت .. نسيـت أن تلك اللحظة يجب أن تكون
لحظة حياتي .. مصري .. مستقبلي .. واستسلمت ببرود
شديد ليأس قاتل ..
كان كل همي أن أودعك .. أودع حجرتي الصغيرة .. أودع
حيطانها وأثاثها .. كدت أكلمها .. أبشها حزني وتأثري
ولكن حانت اللحظة التي كثيرا ما تفاديتها .. صارعت من
أجل ألا تحدث .. وذهبت انت وتشبثت بخيط مــــن
أمل ضعيف ..

I forgot . . forgot that that moment had to be the one moment of my life . . of my destiny, my future . . I surrendered myself, very coldly, to a feeling of fateful despair . . I was totally preoccupied with saying goodbye to you, to my small room . . to the walls and to the furniture . . I almost spoke to them, to transfer my sadness to them . . my emotions . . but the moment came which I had always tried to avoid and for which I have struggled so much for it not to happen . . you went away and I clung to a thread of weak hope.⁽¹⁾

The subjects dealt with in these stories are simple ones and are reiterated time and again. They centre on what happened in the past and its bearing upon the present. But the relationship between the present and the past is not adequately objectified. Its complex dimensions are

1. Ibid, p.73.

neglected. This may be due to the fact that al-Qabā'ilī is a writer of the new generation who lacks literary experience. For this reason, she is unable to penetrate women's inner feelings in her society, or register their emotions, sudden moods, ambitions and struggles in society, as well as her alienation from herself. They are stories that bear the hallmark of a personal, but limited, experience in all its immediacy without pursuing any further social implications. It is worthy of note that the writer, in certain of the stories, attempts to use some of the events and situations that occur between the old generation and the new. In Ākhir Waqt (Last Time)⁽¹⁾, we can see this through the conversation that takes place between the central female character, her mother and her brother over a television debate concerning the problems facing women and their role in society. However, the writer fails to give a clear indication of what is said during the debate. The impression one gets is that it was quite heated on the issue of women but the main female character is very weak in putting forward her ideas, in expressing herself or giving an objective viewpoint, and in taking into account all the dimensions relating to the problems facing the Libyan woman

1. Ibid, pp.31 ff.

in a profound and convincing manner. The one thing the writer does manage to show clearly is the daily routine in women's lives which represents the backwardness of our society, even on a working and intellectual level among some educated Libyan women. This theme is clearly stated in a number of the stories when the central character is a female university student. Her entire thinking is restricted to social relationships and love. In Wa Aṭa^Ctu Qalbī (I Obeyed My Heart),⁽¹⁾ for instance, the girl goes to university and it is her wish to continue her studies:

كان كل تفكيري مركزا على شيء واحد وموضوع واحد
وهدف واحد .. وهو أن أستمّر في دراستي .. وإصراري على
النجاح والتفوق كان يشل عقلي عن التفكير في أي شيء
آخر .. ومرت السنين من نجاح إلى نجاح .. كلما انتهى
عام دراسي ازدادت رغبتني في الإصرار على مواصلة الطريق
حتى النهاية .. ويوما ما أثناني صوته عبر أسلاك الهاتف كان
زميلا ي سبقني في الدراسة بسنوات جمعتنا لقاءات الكلية
المشتركة .

My thoughts were concentrated on one thing . .
on one subject . . on one objective . . namely, to
continue my studies . . my will to succeed and to
excel had made all else from my mind . . the years
passed as I achieved success after success . . At the
end of each year of study, my desire to persist and
continue right to the end grew even more . . one day,
I hear a voice on the telephone . . it was a male
colleague who had preceded me by some years at the
college . . it was the college meetings that brought
us together.⁽²⁾

1. Ibid, pp.43 ff.

2. Ibid, p.45.

In this way, al-Qabā'ilī tries to carry the young woman along on a romantic current as if it were an indispensable part of all women's lives:

أهكذا يصرعك الهوى .. أهكذا تستسلمين لهم
الحب و تتخلين عن الهدف الذى قطعت فيــــه
أشواطاً وتتصدى عواطفى لمنطق العقل .. ولم لا ..
أليس الحب هو غداً
الروح ؟

Is it like you, this feeling of affection that really overthrows you . . why do you give in to love's arrow and relinquish the objective towards which you were making such good headway . . and allow your feelings to override logic . . and why not . . is not love as the air . . the very food of the spirit.⁽¹⁾

Here, the romantic current merges with the reality of psychological and social frustration, features that point to the social and cultural backwardness in which Libyan women live. These social and psychological frustrations which characterize this and other Libyan writers is indicative of repression and social deprivation as a result of the emotional vacuum in which women live because of social customs and traditions that block their path to progress. The central female character in Mawqif Rā'⁽²⁾ is struggling

1. Ibid, p.46.

2. Ibid, pp.165 ff.

against two currents: liberation on the one hand, and tradition on the other, as can be seen in the following passage:

كان يتنازع فاطمة تياران .. الأول يقول لها
تكلمي .. قلولي لهم رأيك .. قفي مع ———
احبك .. لا تكوني سلبية فالحياة حياتك أنست
إن أحمد نعم الشاب فلا تفرطي فيه بمثل هذه
السهولة . أما الثاني .. فكان يضع أمامها يافطة
كبيرة مكتوباً عليها "العادات والتقاليد"

Fatima had to contend with two currents: the first was saying to her, Speak . . Give them your opinion . . . support the one who loves you . . don't take a negative attitude, this life is your life . . Ahmad is a most wonderful young man so don't give him up so easily . .

As to the second current, it had placed a sign in front of her that said: Custom and Tradition.⁽¹⁾

As has already been indicated, the writer contents herself with registering, but not artistically objectifying, the phenomena which are of interest to her. These artistic defects can, it is hoped, be avoided by young writers, both male and female, of the new generation, especially if they benefit from translations into Arabic of books of literary theory written in the West. These translations are bound to assume increasing importance, not least because young

1. Luṭfiyya al-Qabā'ilī, Amānī Mu^callaba, p.161

writers such as al-Qabā'ilī have no adequate knowledge of English or French.

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CHAPTER VII

ᶜABD AL-QĀDIR ABŪ HARRŪS

(A) Introducing Abū Harrūs

In some ways, Abū Harrūs represents the pinnacle of the romantic movement in the Libyan short story. Few writers of this movement succeeded in analysing the psychology of the individual for, though I do not say all, yet the majority of early romantic writers were impressionistic and their artistic approach lacked sufficient experience of the literary genre. They did not possess the degree of artistic skill and knowledge that would have allowed them to fully comprehend the reality of Libyan society and express their concept of the relationship between the individual and reality in a sufficiently dialectical fashion. For this reason, their literary output, founded, as it was, upon a romantic base, often proved to be naive, employing an emotional, subjective or confessional-type approach in an attempt to make comprehensive, generalized statements about the life and circumstances of the individual. Unfortunately, and it is no exaggeration to say this, the romantic period in Libya totally failed to produce a mature

or perfected short story form free of artistic defect. At the beginning of the 1950s, the short story represented a rather unsettled blend of story and unbridled imagination used as it was solely as a vehicle for the author's arbitrary and subjective interpretation of events. In terms of literary skill and craftsmanship - the artistic cohesion between form, content and the issue at hand - this romantic approach cannot be described as successful; to all intents and purposes, the short story, so conceived, appeared little more than a summarised version of a much longer anecdote, tending to develop the characters upon overly romantic lines with little heed being paid to formal elements. Reliance upon narrative, a far-from-complicated technique, is a general feature of this trend, affording the writer an effortless means by which to express himself freely. Certain works of these writers, such as Farīd Sayāla's Al-Hayā Sirā^C (Life Is A Struggle) could, from a quantitative point of view (this story comprises 55 pages), be reckoned as "novels".

It should be emphasized, in fairness to these writers, that literary theory, as a mature trend, was purely in the form of literary impressions or such simple critical reviews as are found in newspapers and book introductions. There

were no writers specialising in, or laying the foundations of, literary criticism in the technical sense. This situation has, unfortunately, continued up to the present time but there are, as already indicated (Chapter I), signs of an increasing interest in the problems of literary form among many literary circles in Libya.

Born in 1930 in Tripoli, Abū Harrūs joined the Teachers' College after completing his secondary school education. Having qualified as a teacher, he started his teaching career in the late forties, then worked as a broadcaster in Tripoli. He edited the "Al-Rā'id" newspaper and, in 1957, published his collection of short stories **Nufūs Ḥā'ira** (Perplexed Souls). Romanticism, then, was a prevailing feature of works written by these authors, for example, by Siyāla or Yūsuf al-Dilansī, and particularly so in the case of ^cAbd al-Qādir Abū Harrūs who is recognised as an early pioneer in the genre of short story writing in Libya. However, his view of this art-form is that of a means of diversion and relaxation as well as, perhaps, a device through which to express his personal tastes and emotions. The manner in which he depicts people and life is a far cry from the reality of Libyan society - he makes no concessions to intellectual or artistic demands and spares no effort to

express 'the overflow of powerful feelings'. Instead of dealing with a particular social class in order to shed light on the problems its members have to face in their daily lives both within society and within the family, his writings concentrate on the private world of individual patterns of behaviour and of subjective feelings.

Abū Harrūs's stories are objectively divorced from reality and broach no social concepts that have an effect upon the lives of the Libyan people. No psychological analysis is made of the characters in a bid to explain the underlying stimuli that motivate and shape their attitudes and behaviour. No-one could argue, therefore, that Abū Harrūs addresses himself to the social problems of his time, problems, indeed, that are still with us. He lives apart from the real world and lacks such sound understanding of society as would allow him to identify, and throw into bold relief, the fundamental problems at issue and assist in the re-structuring of society upon a new and progressive foundation. No, rather than this, he concerns himself with themes that are foreign to the reality of the Libyan environment, to the customs and traditions, inherited and moral values, that regulate the lives of the people. Realism seems to hold no interest for him. The workers, the

merchants, the day labourers, the oppressed classes, the misery of life itself, none of this is to be found in his writings; no penetrating insights are given of working-class lives, nothing is revealed of the underlying forces that determine their attitudes and behaviour, no treatment is provided of the issues and problems that confront the masses.

If we disregard social factors and examine Abū Harrūs's work from another aspect, it must be said that it clearly suffers from a lack of artistic technique. When Abū Harrūs admitted to a fellow-writer that his work did not adhere to the accepted concept of the short story, a feeling no doubt prompted by his recognition that his stories lacked an artistic perspective, he, Abū Harrūs, was also quick to point out that

When I write, I do not like to constrain myself within any accepted guidelines or established techniques. I like to express everything I have to say clearly and frankly without feeling I am being tied down.⁽¹⁾

In truth, the only judgement one can form of the short story genre in Libya during the 1940s and early 1950s is that it was artistically immature. During this infant stage

1. Abū Harrūs, Introduction to "Nufūs Ḥā'ira", Tripoli (1957), p.8.

of modern Libyan literature, writers tended to over-populate their stories with characters and to indulge in a goodly amount of insignificant detail, personal commentary and generalities rather than to provide tangible and concrete facts. In the main, there is a failure among the writers of the romantic period to focus in on a central issue and the lack of integrality tends to undermine any sense of vigour and vitality in their works. Their stories simply have no effect upon the social, economic or political conditions prevailing in the country. The writers of this generation depended totally upon the imagination and the world of dreams, on escape from the reality suffered by the nation, inasmuch as their product bears no relationship to Libyan society as it existed at the time. Their every scene is chockfull with affected or fabricated situations, as, for example, giving the illusion that sweethearts can enjoy moments alone together when, in actual fact, the ever-present barriers set up between the two sexes, together with the social taboos and family traditions that govern the life of women would never allow it.

(B) Portrayal of Women

Abū Harrūs is considered an early pioneer in the treatment of women from a romantic standpoint. A collection

of nine short stories was published in the Libyan newspaper "Ṭarābulus al-Gharb", most of them during the early 1950s; they were later published as an anthology under the title **Nufūs Ḥā'ira** in 1957 and this, in fact, was one of the first short story collections to be published in Libya. However, instead of undertaking a psychological analysis of women, instead of examining the emotional upsets that traditional social and family conditions inflict upon them, his is a superficial treatment that fails to enlighten the reader at all in regard to their humble and degraded position in society. Abū Harrūs lacks the social commitment that would encourage him to discover a woman's true personality, and tackles none of the inherent problems such as divorce and the veil, two issues that serve to typify the status of women in our time and which themselves encourage and endorse the total isolation of the female sex from any form of social intercourse. No treatment is given of the psychological crises experienced by women in their relationships with men, whether it be their father, brother or husband nor of the effect that this has upon society as a whole. On the contrary, Abū Harrūs deals with the issue of women solely in the context of love as if that, together with affected romantic sentiments and sexual instincts, were

the pivot around which their lives revolved. What he conveys to us is an individual or peculiar attitude felt by some individuals without their situation being sufficiently concretized. As a result, no definite form or expression is given to Libyan women in his stories. We see them as imaginary creatures who have no part to play in society, mere shadows looking out from behind a window, or immature adolescents living the romantic love stories they read while left alone within the four walls of the house. In fact, Abū Harrūs tends to take such adolescent girls, who lack any understanding of the meaning of true love, as the central characters in his stories, girls who are socially and emotionally deprived and who are unable to realise themselves as real human beings. Strangely, although the writer obviously believes society to be at fault in preventing a harmonious merger of the body and the spirit in women, yet he makes absolutely no attempt, by pointing an accusing finger at ever-present social contradictions, to shock society into a thorough examination and revaluation of its traditional practices. In other words, he portrays women firmly in the traditional image, one that fails to look deeply into the essence of the problem. Instead, Abū Harrūs treats only the romantic aspect of women in their

search for love, telling of the psychological loss and deprivation, the anxieties and upsets they feel in that regard. The perfect, refined love that imbues the soul with happiness and a sense of security, that is missing from most, if not all, of his stories.

In the short story entitled ḤIndāmā Yamūt al-Ya's (When Despair Dies),⁽¹⁾ the psychological state of the central male character is described through the stream of consciousness, a technique the writer uses in order to express the youth's sentiments in his search for true love. Unfortunately, no serious attempt is made to delineate the distinctive traits of the character; no mention is made of his name nor does Abū Harrūs provide the reader with any concrete details about his life. All that he does provide at times is a personal commentary about the character, his feelings and thoughts, the main issue being reduced to personal comment and emphasis being laid on the fact that the quality of love is the basis for existence. He describes the young man's birth and certain events that occurred during his childhood, but they are little more than fleeting impressions of his life up to his present age of

1. ḤAbd al-Qādir Abū Harrūs, Nufūs Ḥā'ira, Maktabat al-Firjānī, Tripoli (1957), pp.13 ff.

twenty-four years. These observations by the author are somehow juxtaposed with the character's feelings as expressed through the stream of consciousness. It is through this blend that the author underscores the youth's need, at times for love, and at other times, for sexual gratification.

There are impressions that pass through the young man's mind when he is lying in bed one night thinking about a previous time, his mind turning on the emotions and feelings that love inspires, and which he has read about in books that explain the role of love in the world. It is now, as he is reading, that he imagines there to be a young girl outside the window whispering words of love to him. He goes to the window but finds nothing and returns to bed:

ومن وراء النافذة احس بشيء يتحرك وشعر بنفس
تتردد وبلغ اذنيه صوت رقيق هامس الحب . الحب . الحب
.. ونهض خفيفا كالظل الساري والنسمة العابرة واتجه
إلى النافذة يريد ان يحقق احلام يقظته فلم يجد
شيئا .. وعاد إلى الفراش حزينا مهموما شاحب الوجه
وما ان اسند رأسه إلى الوسادة وامسك الكتاب حتى
عاد الصوت الهامس إلى الكلام من جديد .. الحب ..
الحب .. ولم يتحرك هذه المرة وانما قال
وماذا في الحب .

He sensed something moving outside the window and felt he could hear someone repeating a word. A voice, soft and delicate, reached his ears . . . love

. . . love . . . love. He rose stealthily like a night shadow or a passing breeze and he crept to the window to see whether the dream was real. There was nothing. He returned to bed saddened, a dull look on his face. However, no sooner had he once more rested his head against the pillow and taken hold of his book than the voice returned, whispering the words anew . . . love . . . love . . . love. This time he remained still, saying to himself, 'What's love anyway?'⁽¹⁾

It is noticeable that this somewhat exaggerated romantic approach has a negative effect upon the story's artistic structure. Furthermore, the writer clearly occupies an insular position vis-a-vis society as a whole and steers clear of any sense of realism. As stated, Abū Harrūs appears more concerned with issues that have no relationship with reality, the majority of his stories taking place in an environment alien to the Libyan way of life. He pays no attention to the tragedy of the Libyan woman, the suffering she has to endure in her relationship with society nor does he concern himself with the social structure that has brought about the suppression of the female sex. He extols the quality of love but fails to portray it as it really is experienced, tied, as it is, to all the confusion and anxiety that results from the continuing conflict between

1. ^cAbd al-Qādir Abū Harrūs, Nufūs Ḥā'ira, pp.21-22.

the old ways and the new. The writer creates an image of social frustration but though there is an attempt to develop the character in this story to a certain extent, he remains a stereotype living in a dream world. He remains a superficial figure - he feels a persistent and overwhelming need to find love but the author does not render this love as a spontaneous sensation on the part of the character.

The story lacks artistic texture and no serious attempt is made to portray the character in depth; the story is given cursory treatment and is somewhat exaggerated, concentrating on a young man who seeks refuge in the image of a beautiful girl seemingly offering him love outside his window.

In Ḍhilāl ʿAlā Wajh Malāk (Shadows on the Face of an Angel),⁽¹⁾ Abū Harrūs's intention is to accentuate the harm done to society through the low status of women and their isolation from the world of men. The two sisters in the story both fall in love with the same young man they have seen walking past their window. The younger sister is a happy, lively girl indignant about the position of women, as represented in herself. She lives in a world of dreams and romantic sentiment, receptive to the music of love, her

1. Ibid, pp.61 ff.

heart aflame in adoration for the young man whom she knows hardly at all. Both sisters are, in fact, infinitely emotional and incurably romantic. The most important of the various situations and images invoked by the writer in order to develop the story is the fact that the two sisters, unusually, have fallen for the same man. The other sister, Najwā by name, also finds herself in love with the young man and believes that he loves her in return. She is a very reserved person and is deeply-shocked when she finds out that the youth intends to ask for her younger sister's hand in marriage. The father, however, asks for the engagement to be postponed until Najwā herself has become engaged, a situation indicative of family traditions in Libyan society wherein the younger sister cannot be betrothed before the elder sister. Unfortunately, the problem remains unresolved at the end of the story because Najwā refuses offers of marriage from many young men because she is already deeply in love.

In this, as in other stories by Abū Harrūs, there is a failure on the part of the writer to offer a sufficient description of the characters involved; he ignores the concrete details and individual traits that distinguish one character from another, a feature that results from his

excessive use of monotonous narrative and dialogue tied to a love story that is highly exaggerated.

It is a mark of the writer that he retreats from the Libyan environment and prevailing social conditions to enter a special world of his own. The short story Najlā al-Hā'ira fī Dimashq (Najla Perplexed in Damascus)⁽¹⁾ represents a part of the author's own personal experiences and tells of the time he met Najlā, a liberated young lady of Libyan origin who was a student at the university in Damascus and a member of an immigrant bourgeois family. The Libyan family adopts a just and fair-minded attitude towards their daughters, allowing them freedom and the right to receive an education. The writer is invited to visit the girl's family to take tea and a conversation takes place between him and Najlā concerning the position of women in Libya. He makes an indirect comparison between the advancement of women and the opportunities available to them in Syria and between the backward and lowly position they hold in Libya, pointing out the absurdity of the two situations. This conversation is presented to the reader in the way of direct dialogue and touches too upon the question

1. ^cAbd al-Qādir Abū Harrūs, Nufūs Hā'ira, pp.27 ff.

of love, a subject that also becomes a statement on social conditions. However, the storyline is somewhat insignificant, the characterisation is exceedingly sparse and the story is not allowed to develop in the proper way.

Abū Harrūs's use of direct statement and over-digression renders the story devoid of any artistic value. It is nothing more than a sketch of an educated young girl living in a liberated household within a more progressive society, culturally and educationally, and where, unlike Libya, men and women are not cut off from each other. The author does not fall passionately in love with Najwā but is simply captivated by her. No tangible details are given, either of the characters or of the physical environment. Instead, the story is full of abstract ideas about the traditional marriage and material problems: is marriage merely a commercial enterprise and a young girl nothing more than a commodity? There are hints in the story that the author is suggesting that complete equality between men and women would serve as the solution to such questions. At the end of the story, the author and Najwā part on good terms without demonstrating any feelings or emotions. Thus, the author passes through a mood of self-communion, criticising the harsh traditions upon which the man-woman relationship

is based in Libya:

نعم ، كل شيء إلا الحب والمرأة في بلدي ..
انه شيء عيب هذا الذي ندعوه الحب ، تحضره
التقاليد وتمنعه بقوة العادات والعرف
الجاري .
وكيف تعيشون اذا .. هيئالت ؟
النساء لوحدهن والرجال لوحدهم .
هكذا دون اختلاط دون اجتماع ودون حب .

"Yes . . . there exists everything in my country except love and women. This thing that we call love is looked upon as shameful, and it is constrained by traditions and harsh customs and habits."

"How can you live like that?, she asked. "The women on their own, the men on theirs." "Just like that; without mixing together . . without love", he said.⁽¹⁾

In Azīza, the characters bear no resemblance to real people at all. They are wrested solely from the writer's imagination as he attempts to relate them to reality through the expression of human emotions. However, these deep, inner feelings of the characters turn out to be no more than sentimental, romantic notions and the writer's isolation from society is such that the romantic trend in this story is totally devoid of social identity, a mere symbol that has very little to do with human society. The heroine of the

1. Ibid, pp.32-33.

piece lives in the forest and feels totally at one with nature. Her idyllic state is completed through her love for ^CAzīz, the hero whom she had met of a sudden whilst she was swimming ecstatically in a brook one day. As she was trying to pick a flower, ^CAzīz had taken her arm and spoken to her of love, of understanding and spiritual harmony. Abū Harrūs creates a romantic, almost ethereal, atmosphere for his hero:

وأما من أي البلاد قدمت فليس لي بلد بالذات
 انصب اليها أنا من الأرض الواسعة لأعرف لي أبا
 ولا أما ولا أقرباء، ولدتني الطبيعة فهي أمي الحنون
 وارضعتني مياهها ونباتاتها وفواكهها ونسماتها فهي
 نسي الكبر بلادي حيث لا بلاد وارضي حيث لا ارض واهلي
 حيث لا أهل .
 أنا من العراء وإلى العراء وفي احضان
 العراء أعيش ..

What country do I come from? There is no particular country to which I am affiliated. I am from the wide reaches of the land. I have no father, mother or ones who are near and dear to me. Nature bore me; she is my gentle mother and it is upon her water, her plants, her fruit and her breeze that I suckled. She is my great matrix; since I have no country, she is my country; she is my land when, in fact, I belong to no land; she is my people when, in fact, I belong to no people. I come from the open sky and it is to the open sky that I go and in its bosom I live.⁽¹⁾

1. Ibid, p.48.

These characters live in a rose-coloured world that has no basis in reality, totally isolated from the world of people outside the forest and devoid of all traits characteristic of societal life, finding happiness and enjoyment in their solitude. Abū Harrūs underlies the subjective attitudes adopted by the hero and the heroine since his point of departure is the phase or phases of consciousness or moments of subjectivity experienced by the two characters; these subjective attitudes are presented as substitutes for real motives of behaviour. The heroine becomes attracted to him and tells him that she lives alone in the forest. Nevertheless, she senses something is missing in her life. ^cAzīz tells her that he lives in the city and that he, too, is missing something. In other words, both of them are missing the sensation of love, the one thing that would make their lives complete. What is being stressed by this subjective approach is that love is, in fact, available to every city dweller. Unfortunately, the people there are too self-centred, too much in love with themselves, to experience and enjoy that true, sublime feeling of unselfish love between two harmonious spirits.

This story embodies the romantic nature that is to be found in man and woman; love is symbolised by the birds, the

gazelles, the branches of the trees and the rays of the sun, symbols that, however, have little connection with reality. They tell us nothing at all save the fact that Abū Harrūs fails to tackle the basic issues facing society preferring, instead, to deal with minor subjective issues about which he has very little to say; all of this reveals his detachment and lack of interaction with society.

In depicting the events that take place in his short stories, Abū Harrūs neglects the effect of those events upon the environment. Moreover, the characters, their eccentricities, whims and so forth, are presented in an arbitrary manner. No psychological analysis is made and he fails to examine the effect that social and family conditions have upon them. This is entirely due to the fact that the author takes a piecemeal view of things, a subjective, not objective, view that bears little or no relation to reality or the social, economic and political conditions prevailing in society. He simply does not comprehend the true dimensions of reality and does not understand how material and spiritual matters are interconnected. He is content to express a static vision or conception of the environment and life in society as it is, without allowing any scope for dynamic change, particularly in regard to women.

(C) Artistic Defects of his Approach

The cause of Abū Harrūs's shortcomings in this literary field lies in the fact that he constrains himself within a world of fantasy. It is as though he reclines upon an almost elitist conception of art, thus widening the gap between it and society, especially insofar as the position of women is concerned. Abū Harrūs is unable to understand other people's lives or to express what they are truly feeling or experiencing, being ignorant of the pain and misery they feel and unable and incapable of identifying with their lives. Art, for Abū Harrūs, is a means of diversion and relaxation. His work most likely appeals to a limited section of Libyan society, an appeal that is due to a depiction of love that overly stretches the imagination. The male characters are always passionately in love while the female characters are adolescent girls who live in a dream world for it is through dreams that they fill the void in their lives. The girls are lonely and abandoned inside the house, forever daydreaming and showing signs of the psychological frustration from which they suffer. These elements are to be found in every one of the writer's short stories, even those in which an attempt is made to criticise society. Here, too, he indulges in excessive romanticism.

In Sirr al-Anāqa (The Secret of Elegance),⁽¹⁾ the writer endeavours to spotlight aspects of society as they relate to the position of women and, in this, presents what is, to all intents and purposes, a summary of the author's stance vis-a-vis women's liberation in Libya. His view is that the force of tradition is more powerful than that of the individual, the implication being that Libyan society cannot be changed through individual effort, only through collective will. The solution resorted to by the individual in this story is, therefore, inapplicable to society as a whole. The central male character is used to seeing his sweetheart every day; there are certain romantic passages such as when they talk together tenderly of love, or when the hero draws a mental image of the innocence of his sweetheart when she was a child. However, meetings between men and women such as this simply do not take place within the fold of Libyan traditions. Although it is stated that the father feels the meetings between his daughter and Sālim do not accord with customary habits in Libya, yet life as it really is is not reflected at all in the majority of Abū Harrūs's stories. They are usually related in narrative but do include some tangible details to do with the question of

1. ^cAbd al-Qādir Abū Harrūs, Nufūs Ḥā'ira, pp.159 ff.

love notwithstanding the harsh domination of traditions in Libyan life. There is nothing forthcoming in these stories of properly determined objective criticism and they only offer individual solutions to social problems. It is for this reason that the majority of the female characters in Abū Harrūs's works live within a single environment and breathe the same romantic, sentimental air.

In Dumya Nāfi^ca (A Useful Puppet)⁽¹⁾ a somewhat mocking tone is adopted in telling the story of a wife, unnamed by the writer and apparently of little worth who ultimately proves that she is, indeed, a creature of value. The male character devotes his entire life to literature and thinks of nothing else. He suffers, as did most young Libyan men of the time, from having his feet in two worlds, that of imagination and that of reality. On a level of fertile imagination, the youth entertains intellectual ambitions and in his conversations with friends he often mentions the names of major Libyan writers such as al-Miṣrātī, al-Tillī-sī, Abū Hāmid and others. Moreover, he is influenced to a great extent by the works of the German poets such as Goethe and Heine, the poets of the romantic movement in England, and the major Egyptian writers such as Tawfīq al-Hakīm,

1. Ibid, pp.115 ff.

Yūsuf Idrīs, ʿAbd al-Ḥalīm ʿAbdullah, and Iḥsān ʿAbd al-Qaddūs. His view of Libyan women has been moulded entirely by what he has read in literature. The heroines of these poems and works of fiction has determined his conception of woman and, indeed, such literature has been instrumental in encouraging the young man to see life from a romantic and idealistic standpoint. The real side of life, the wretchedness and misery, is acutely felt after such flights of imagination when the traditional lifestyle and clothing of the Libyan woman becomes a reality to him. By its very nature, this reality is inconsistent with that of a romantic and idyllic view.

This contradiction between the real and imaginary worlds is what gives this story its distinctive colour. The young man is suddenly confronted by the reality of things when he marries a Libyan girl in the traditional way. The psychological state of the youth and the association of ideas which pass through his mind during the wedding night are convincingly portrayed. Abū Harrūs describes him on that night by saying: "He was with them in body, but not in mind or spirit."⁽¹⁾

1. Ibid, p.122.

It is mental torture to the groom when he sees the wan complexion of his bride for the first time for now all his dreams are fast disappearing. His conception of Libyan women has been fuelled solely by what he has read in books and the gulf between the real world and his own delusion becomes clear to him during the first few days of marriage. Absolutely no mental, or even spiritual, accord exists between the newly-weds; when he listens to her, the dreams and visions he had conjured up of women through his reading of literature are simply not there. Instead, "He heard her voice resounding on his eardrums, disagreeable, dry and harsh." (1)

The artistic immaturity of this story is due to the arbitrary methods resorted to by Abū Harrūs in order to develop the action, as, for example, the sudden change that takes place in the wife who, quite spontaneously, demonstrates an intellectual awareness. The writer does this as a means to convey his social message, namely that women's natural instincts allow them to enjoy literature as much as men. This arbitrary approach is plain to see in the following passage in which the wife debates the philosophy of life with her husband:

وصمت قليلا قبل ان تجيبه وقبل ان تحدثه عن كل ما يعتمل

1. Ibid, p.124.

في نفسها ويضطرب في اعماقها من اراء وافكار وخواطر
عاشت كل هذه المدة تنصهر يوما بعد يوم في بوثقة من
الكبت والحرمان والصبر الطويل وقالت اخيرا :
الحياة يا علي بعد ما جربتها فهمت منها شيئا كثيرة ولكن
لأن اني انحس بأن اللي فهمته ما هو شيء قدام حقيقتها
وفي بعض الاحيان يخيل الي ان فهمي للحياة كلام فاضي، لأن
الحياة هي نفوسنا ومشاعرنا واحساساتنا وعقولنا ، موش هي
صخرة نقدر نقول ان طولها ميتر وعرضها ٧ ميتر وشكلها
اسود أو ابيض ، الحياة يا علي هي انت و امالك
واراك ، وهي انسي وامالي وموش شيء ————— اني
غير هذا

She remained quiet for a little while before answering him, before telling him what she felt deep inside, of the restless thoughts and ideas that she had entertained all the while. Day after day, she had had been floundering in a melting-pot of books, of deprivation, and long-lasting patience. At last she said to her husband, "Ali, life as I have experienced it has allowed me to understand many things. But until now I feel that what I have understood is nothing compared to the reality of life itself. nothing compared to what really is. Sometimes my understanding of life is utter nonsense. Life is ourselves, our feelings, our senses, our minds. It is not a piece of rock set at one metre long and seven metres wide, nor is it a question of black or white. Life, Ali, is you, your hopes, your ideas; it is me, with my hopes and my ideas. Nothing else." (1)

The idea presented by the writer is somewhat nebulous in that the characterisation of the woman is hollow and without meaning. We never find in stories written by Abū Harrūs any analysis of the characters' relationships either with their own selves, with others, or with events, things, and natural

1. Ibid, pp.131-132.

phenomena. The social images conveyed by the writer in the form of short stories lack any examination of the ties that bind the psychological and emotional components to social factors. Another flaw in Abū Harrūs's writings is that he deals only with a certain class of people and, furthermore, is concerned with issues that have no basis in the social reality of Libya, particularly during the period in which the stories were written, a time that was scarred by complex customs, traditions and inherited values, both tribal and rural.

In Dumya Nāfi^ca, Abū Harrūs gives a hazy picture of the female personality in Libyan society and overstates the central issue he is presenting. In all, it is an unreal picture of life in Libya. Here, we should turn our attention to the stories from an artistic and technical point of view, Abū Harrūs having admitted them to be mere "social images".⁽¹⁾ In truth, they do not, in artistic terms, belong to the genre of the modern short story for they are devoid of all the customary artistic elements that befit that genre; they are stories crammed full of insignificant details and further burdened by the author's own scattered comments. They fail to concentrate upon a

1. Ibid, p.8.

specific issue and there is a lack of organic unity due to the amassing of non-essential particulars. The dramatic mode of presentation which would have made the plot viable and inevitable is not sufficiently felt or developed. The effect is evoked through a slapdash method of direct narration.

In the story entitled Bidā^ca Mustawrada (Imported Merchandise),⁽¹⁾ Abū Harrūs tackles the issue of the modern woman and makes it clear that an individual attempt to solve the problem of women simply will not work - it is the collective solution towards which society must strive. This particular story suffers very badly from an artistic standpoint - it is written in direct statement akin to a magazine article; moreover, the main issue in the story's development - the unfaithfulness of the wife as a result of the difference between her background, culture and upbringing and that of her husband - comes practically at the end of the story. From beginning to end, the story is told in narrative form with an abundance of detail. It concerns a bourgeois family, the central male character being a junior functionary by profession. The problem is

1. Ibid, pp.143 ff.

that, gentle and romantically-inclined person that he is, he lives in a world of his own. It is not his wish to enter into a traditional marriage but to wed an educated girl in a context of love and understanding. This is set out in the following extract in which the man compares Libyan women to foreign women and explains his ideal of a future wife:

ولكنني اريد فتاة تفهمني وافهمها وتحب في النفس والرجل
والزوج وأحب فيها النفس والمرأة والزوجة وهذه ليست موجودة
عندنا لان فتياتنا مازلن دون هذه الدرجة من الوعي والادراك والنفج
ان هذه الفتاة هناك في الخارج خارج بلادنا حيث المرأة متعوده
على الحرية وواعية لمركزها في الحياة ، هناك المرأة شريكة
في الحياة ، وهنا خادمة حقيرة تافهة في البيت وانني لسن
اتزوج با امرأة تكون من الصنع المحلي ولو بقيت طول حياتي
اعزب لانني افهم ان الزواج حياة يتجاوب فيها
نفسان ويعيش بها روحان .

But I want a girl who understands me and whom I understand, someone who would love me spiritually as a man and as a husband and whom I would love spiritually as a woman and as a wife. Such a girl is not to be found in Libya because our own girls still lack this level of awareness, perception and maturity. In foreign countries where women have freedom and are aware of their importance in society, such a girl can be found and the wife is a man's partner in life. Here, in our country, she is nothing more than a menial servant around the house. I shall never marry a girl who has been conditioned by our local environment, even if I had to remain a bachelor all my life. I realise that marriage means a life in which two human beings live and spiritually respond to one another.⁽¹⁾

The man's inability to find an intellectually mature girl

Ibid, pp.148-149.

in his own country is due to the fact that Libyan society at that time did not afford adequate educational facilities to girls. It is unfortunate that Abū Harrūs does not develop the story organically but solely through narration and applies this technique rather than dialogue to convey a series of conversations that take place between ʿAlī, the hero, and his friends.

ʿAlī travels to Beirut as part of a delegation and marries a Lebanese girl with whom he returns to his native land. However, grief overcomes him when he finds out that she has entered into a liaison with a Lebanese man working for a foreign company in Libya. He divorces her and sends her back to her family. The one topic that dominates all of Abū Harrūs's writings, as if nothing else existed, is love; every character in his stories has to be in love. However, he fails to convince the reader that love as he presents it is possible within Libyan society because he shows only one side of the issue; never does he turn his pen to the feelings of deprivation, to the psychological and social frustrations from which women suffer. He affords no insight into these feelings that would, for example, aid a psychological analysis of the Libyan woman. Instead, he simply describes some of the burning and passionate emotions felt by the characters but does so by means of highly-

exaggerated images of romantic frustration that are without reason and are in no way convincing. The sole aim of most stories by Abū Harrūs is to offer a means of distraction or relaxation. The events depicted never seriously focus on human, social, intellectual, or even political conflicts and so do not throw into relief such dialectical contradictions as are often felt to occur between the individual and society. His approach is to relate, or "picture", a particular situation, and express his own subjective reactions through the technique of direct statement while indulging in a good deal of descriptive digression. This approach, which is far from being dialectically complex, is directly linked to the fact that Abū Harrūs often resurrects the same themes or issues in his stories, merely giving the characters different names. His stories are not stories in the accepted artistic sense, being no more than fleeting or passing images of society. The author himself states:

Before I talk about the images that I have drawn in this book, I wish the reader to first understand that I like to focus in strongly upon a particular image that appeals to me more as an image or a picture of society than a short story.⁽¹⁾

These images are, however, artistically immature and

1. Introduction, p.8.

indicate a lack of acquaintance with the principles of artistic form in the short story.

In ḤIndamā Yufgud al-Āmal (When Hope Is Lost),⁽¹⁾ the story begins with a description of a Libyan wedding reception. Abū Harrūs illustrates the social customs and traditions that are related to the marriage ceremony and which, in most cases, prove to be counter-productive; for example, the marriage will generally end in failure. In this story, the bridegroom goes with his friends to the bride's house on the wedding day, his mind bursting with a myriad thoughts. How should he behave towards his wife? What should he say to her, a woman he has never before seen and whose name he does not even know? His head is abuzz with his friends' advice. He, himself, imagines her to be like one of the film stars he sees on the cinema screen. The bride, for her part, is also harbouring anxious thoughts about her future husband. What will he be like? How does he act? Her own friends' words of advice resound strongly in her ears, warning her against being too friendly towards the groom. On the contrary, she should be somewhat unsociable, show herself as a strong-willed and stubborn person, and adopt a cautious

1. ḤAbd al-Qādir Abū Harrūs, Nufūs Hā'ira, pp.67 ff.

attitude towards the bridegroom:

واحست بالخوف منه قبل أن تراه وكانت تعد كل
دقيقة تمر بها في ليالي فرحها الخمس، وتتخايل
معا ما سيحدث وترسم لنفسها في مرآة فكرها صورا
شاحبة عن أيامها المقبلة، وخفق قلبها بعنف ليلة الخميس
قبل موعد الزفاف بليلة، حين قدمت عليها صديقة لها مستزوجة
وهمست في أذنها "خيرك صفه زى الكرم اضحكي شوية وما تخلّيش
الناس يفهموا أنك خائفة"
ازدادت اصرارا وهي تسمع من المديقة هذا الكلام فأنها
لم تكن تعتقد انها خائفة قبل الان، وانما كانت تظن انها
كثيرة التفكير فقط اما انها خائفة فلا. وشعرت تلك اللحظة
فقط بالخوف ولكن من ماذا ؟
هذا هو الذى يحيرها ————— .

It was now that she felt afraid before seeing him. She had counted every minute that had passed during the five-day ceremony, imagining everything that would happen and invoking a somewhat dim vision of her future life. Her heart had really been trembling that Wednesday night, before the actual wedding night. A married friend had come to call and whispered to her, 'You look as pale as a sheet. Laugh a little so no-one will know you are scared.' She had grown paler as she listened to her friend. She had not believed herself to be afraid before now, just that she had had so many things on her mind. But afraid? No. It was only now that she truly felt afraid. But why? It was this that puzzled her.⁽¹⁾

Thus is the bride taken by fear and alarm. Her stomach is turning over and she feels ready to cry now that the bridegroom is about to arrive. However, upon his arrival happiness and joy take the place of her fears for the groom

1. Ibid, p.106.

is a charming person who treats her gently, contrary to everything her friends had told her. From this story, one can understand the intense anxiety and suffering felt on such occasions, although, as we see here, the husband-to-be turned out to be a kind and compassionate man.

Artistically, the majority of the stories lack any sense of organic unity and, as a result, lack the ingredients that constitute mature and perfected works of art. Abū Harrūs fills his stories with so many characters and so many different events that all semblance of artistic form is removed - for this reason, we feel that aesthetic integrity is lacking. This means that from the point of view of presentation, the stories lack vitality and vigour because the author tends to over-digress and, in addition to the use of narrative and direct statement which generally leads to monotony and repetition, he is hampered by the preponderance of stereotyped expressions. Abū Harrūs does not let the story speak for itself; he is ever-present and imposes himself not only upon the reader but upon the events themselves, whether by manipulating them or explaining their purport. In essence, he is delivering a didactic message, and a very unsubtle one at that. His many descriptive and stylistic digressions tend to flaw his work considerably and his descriptive and analytical portraits are restricted to

the absolute minimum. His limited methodical approach to his short stories results in narrative and direct statement being an inevitable artistic defect because the plot is given not in the form customarily expected in a short story but as something akin to a rendition of events as would typify a magazine article or the like. In many instances, the stories come across as portraits of events that take place in society without attempting to depict the true suffering that takes place or to tackle the events in a critical or objective fashion. Abū Harrūs renders no psychological analysis of the characters, nor an objective examination of the issues raised.

Following this study of Abū Harrūs's work, we simply have to ask ourselves: why were the works of Abū Harrūs, Za^cĪma al-Bārūnī and Farīd Siyāla not subject to critical review in the field of literary criticism? It is likely that the concept of truly objective literary criticism, despite its relative development in Egypt and other Arab countries, has not reached full maturity in Libya. Moreover, most literary critics, men of letters and short story writers are personally known to one another and therefore shy away from any objective evaluation of literary work which is produced.

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CHAPTER VIII

BASHĪR AL-HĀSHIMĪ

(A) Introducing al-Hāshimī

To examine the short stories of Bashīr al-Hāshimī is to realise that controversial and debatable social issues are a fundamental part of modern Libyan literature, especially in regard to the status of Libyan women. This is, in fact, a reaction against the severe backwardness the country has been and, in some respects, is still subject to, a factor that served to encourage and motivate Libyan writers towards a treatment of problems in society. Indeed, we have already seen how the short story genre in Libya early on adopted a reformatory stance through the writers' interest in and desire for a better society.

Short stories that, in the main, concern themselves with social problems all share certain artistic traits; however, the artistic level itself varies in accordance with the literary skill of the writer, his or her degree of perfection in the language and ability to express the social issues in a way that impresses them upon the reader. Nevertheless, a goodly number of the stories lack real dimensions on an imaginative level and this results in a

primitive and naive treatment of the issues raised. The weakness in their writings can be attributed to their lack of deep understanding of the environment and culture to which they turned their pens. Certain problems in society attracted their attention and these they conveyed only at face-value with no examination being made of the underlying issues that lay at the root of the problems. The stories became jam-packed with events and characters and tried to deal with so many issues that, as is the case with al-Hāshimī, they fell outside the scope of the short story, the intent of which is to present and deal with a specific issue or aspect of life in an artistic manner.

Al-Hāshimī is unable, in his short stories, to absorb social conditions and the many contradictions that pervade society and present them objectively in a suitably artistic form. As a result, he fails to give a complete picture of the struggle that is being waged within society, particularly in regard to the women's conflict with or revolt against out-moded traditions. No concrete form is given to social tragedy nor does al-Hāshimī delve into the causes of prevailing social conditions or make any attempt to examine the social structure itself. He is content simply to direct the reader's attention to certain phenomena, his stories generally dealing with some transient

feature of Libyan life and not the important and enduring issues.

The stories wander and meander around the alleyways and working-class districts, particularly those located in the old part of the city. Women are seen emerging from these alleys and timeworn houses, like shadows with no clearcut and tangible features. Al-Hāshimī's characters suffer misery and degradation but without any criticism as to their status and circumstances being made by the author. They are characters based on generalisations, linear representations that lack multi-dimensional development, oft-repeated and lacking any artistic perspective within the social structure. Authority in society is represented in these stories as vested in the father, husband or brother, inasmuch as it is the man who dictates the behaviour of society and lays down the law both in society and in the home. Women remain submissive beings made to suffer the yoke of familial and social repression, completely cut off from the world. Unfortunately, with al-Hāshimī the element of contradiction in women's status is lost, her role being taken as accepted. For this reason, the stories lack the complexity and structure of the relationships that exist between women and the world of men. The feelings of oppression and subjugation are conveyed but without the

cultural, social or philosophical context that normally tends to shed light on such relationships.

Bashīr al-Hāshimī was born in the town of Masratah in 1936 and began his literary career early in 1952. His first short story, Mas^cūd⁽¹⁾ was published in the magazine "Fezzan" in 1957. The first collection of short stories, **Al-Nās wa al-Dunyā** (People and the World), was published in 1965, the second, **Aḥzān ^cAmm al-Dūkālī** (The Sadness of 'Uncle' Dukali), in 1967 and the third, **Al-Aṣābi^c al-ṣaghīra** (Tiny Fingers), in 1972. These three collections were then brought together in one volume entitled **3 Majmū^cāt Qaṣaṣiyya** (Three Short Story Collections).

In addition to the above, Bashīr al-Hāshimī wrote several literary articles and studies that were published under the titles **Al-Adab al-Ḥadīth** (Modern Literature) in 1979 and **Khalfiyyāt al-Takwīn al-Qaṣaṣī fī Libya - Dirāsa wa Nusūs** (Background to the Creation of the Story in Libya - Study and Texts), in 1984.

His first attempts at short story writing were no more than an expression of the author's own subjective reactions

1. Bashīr al-Hāshimī, 3 Majmū^cāt Qaṣaṣiyya, Al-Munsha'a al-^cĀmma l-il-Nashr wa al-Tawzī^c wa al-I^clām, Tripoli (n.d.)

to the social conditions in which he lived. For the most part, his stories lack any mention, let alone analysis, of the complexities that mark society and human relationships in Libyan society. One has a clear impression that what al-Hāshimī presents in his work is only a small part of the contradictions of social reality. The author describes certain material aspects of his characters such as what the heroine wears, what she looks like, or how she talks but he neglects the role played by social contradictions in determining human behaviour. In the majority of the stories, the central male figure lives in a dream-world and is seen going to pieces slowly, with complete indifference on his part; in other words, there is no distinct dramatic struggle expressed between the individual and society. Al-Hāshimī fashions his stories using the techniques of narrative and direct statement, most often offering only a casual criticism of society, and this has the disadvantage of interfering with the artistic flow as is evident in Al-Bāb al-Azraq (The Blue Door),⁽¹⁾ Al-Shajara (The Tree)⁽²⁾

1. Bashīr al-Hāshimī, 3 Majmū'āt Qaṣaṣiyya, pp.79 ff.

2. Ibid, pp.25 ff.

and Nūr al-ʿAyn (Light of the Eye).⁽¹⁾ The critic, Maḥmūd Nāfi^c has this to say:

Bashīr al-Hāshimī does not go beyond the stage at which he spontaneously receives impressions (from the outside world) and of transcribing them in a stereotyped satirical form. He registers some of his own comments, imposing them externally on the action. Thus, he conveys a popular caricature which actually removes his work from the true atmosphere of good short stories. It is not a fault in a writer to adopt any style to express what life is like in small alleys and local districts. What really faults a writer is that his process of creation results in distorting the salient features which are necessary for drawing a convincing portrait and which should convey to the reader a proper psychological impression.⁽²⁾

(B) His Portrayal of Women

The majority of the female characters in al-Hāshimī's stories are artistically indistinct, having been subjectively determined without finding an adequate objective correlative for their emotions and attitudes. As Maḥmūd Nāfi^c has pointed out, al-Hāshimī is a product of the Libyan way of life - he never travelled abroad, nor was he able to complete his studies. This has resulted in an immature approach to the short story, a factor reflected in

1. Ibid, pp.55 ff.

2. Maḥmūd Nāfi^c, "Al-Namūdḥaj wa al-Qaḍiyya fī 'al-Nās wa al-Dunyā", Al-Ruwḥād, No.4 (April 1966).

the quality of the author's literary output. For example, in Al-Layālī (The Nights)⁽¹⁾ from the collection **Al-Aṣābi^c al-ṣaghīra** (Little Fingers), al-Hāshimī draws a portrait of a doomed love. Sulayman, the central male character, espies a young girl only twice but from that moment on, although he neither knows her name nor what she is like as a person, she dominates his soul completely. The writer over-indulges in a torrent of statements and narrative, conveying numerous facts directly and tending to overload the story with too many details. This approach results in the loss of really integrating artistic elements and none of the characters in the story hold any intellectual view with regard to prevailing social issues. The artistic and social perspectives in this story are therefore extremely blurred and hazy. It is not easy to home in on any organic necessity in the three collections of short stories. Despite the fact that **Al-Aṣābi^c al-ṣaghīra** is the final collection, one senses that the stories are immature and contain poorly conceived ideas, that his characters are superficial representations of people the author has worked with and felt emotionally tied to. Although he describes their features quite comprehensively, yet little effort is

1. Ibid, pp.271 ff.

made to weave a plot or found the stories upon a solid artistic foundation.

In Maryam,⁽¹⁾ for example, the writer deals with the suffocating environment in which the young girl, Maryam, lives and which binds her to a life of submission and despair. However, there is no indication of any wish on the writer's part to deliver Maryam from such a terrible ordeal and he is content to convey two different images of the girl. Tradition has denied Maryam all of her social rights, living, as she does, in a traditional family with no possibility of receiving an education and shut up, like other girls, behind four walls. It is in this atmosphere that al-Hāshimī describes the girl's feelings, the dreams she harbours and which she confides to her friends about the life she is looking forward to and the kind of husband she would like to marry. That same day, a man, a stranger to Maryam, calls at the house and asks to marry her. The family agrees and Maryam is taken off to a new life, to join the traditional grind that Libyan women are made to suffer in the kitchen their whole lives through: preparing meals, washing and the general routine of a wife's lot. Where, before, she had been a sweet, naive young girl, whom the female neighbours had regarded as remarkably beautiful, she

1. Bashīr al-Hāshimī, 3 MajmūCāt, pp.253 ff.

The use of the word 'washwasha' is therefore justified because it enhances the reader's attention in detecting potential dramatic or ironic elements in the passage about Māryam. This woman, previously a picture of joy, has been turned into the traditional image of a housewife, unhappiness and misery etched on her face. However, the use of narrative to convey these impressions produces a feeling of boredom in the reader and the actual suffering of the woman, particularly the constraints such a lifestyle imposes upon her, are never highlighted as they should be. Her life, especially before the marriage, is not hers to control. As a child, we see her dreaming about the future and what it holds for her. In fact, tradition, as the writer points out, governs her life and her future must submit to the force of custom. The story ends on a sad, and inevitable, note - all the hopes and dreams of the now wretched and unhappy Māryam have been utterly dashed. We should point out, nevertheless, that al-Hāshimī's stance itself is a traditional one inasmuch as he makes no appeal for change or revolt against the erroneous traditional concepts which are often the direct cause of a woman's misery and the shattering of all her dreams. Al-Hāshimī makes no mention of the new image in which the woman must be moulded and neglects the issue of education and the effect

that its denial to women has upon the home; nor does he tackle the problem of the woman's severe repression within the family. All of these factors, social and inherited, are issues the writer should debate as part of the context of the situation. Al-Hāmiṣhī makes no suggestion as to any possible change and, as a writer, he should, but does not, present a comprehensive synthesis of the problems in a way that does not separate the form from the content.

This explains why al-Hāshimī is incapable of concretising the idea of social change as a desirable ideal, especially in regard to the question of women, during the fifties and sixties, the period treated by the author. He allows himself, as I have said, to be swept away in narrative and direct statement and overloads the story with details that have no real bearing on the plot. Moreover, he imposes himself on the story and this occasions a loss in many artistic elements that go to make up an integral work of art. The following extract from "Māryam" will give an indication of how al-Hāshimī interferes with the action through unnecessary, personal comment:

وصدقوني لأدري لماذا اعتبر نفسي شاهد اثبات
لهذه الأحلام الدفينية .. ربما لأنني كنت اتلمص عليها
واسترق السمع الى كلامها مع البنات .. لأدري أى شيطان
كان يدفعني للاهتمام بمريم وبما تقول .. صدقوني لا اعرف
كنت اجيد اختيار المكان الذي أجلس فيه تحت السدة ..
في الخزانة ومع الأسف كان يكتشف مكاني في بعض
الحالات لان قطعة من المفيح أو واحدة من القلل تمسك بـ

بيدي أو قدمي فتحدث موتا كفيلا بأن يثير
انتباه اهـ
البيت كله .

Believe me, I don't why I consider myself a witness for the prosecution in regard to her secret dreams. Perhaps because I was peeking at her and eavesdropping on what she was saying to the girls. I don't know what devil induced me to listen to what Maryam was saying. Believe me, I don't know. I used to choose a good place to lie in the storage compartment under the wooden bed. Unfortunately, I was discovered sometimes because my hand or foot would accidentally hit a piece of iron or a water jug and was guaranteed to make a noise loud enough to attract the attention of the entire family.⁽¹⁾

The use of the expression 'shāhid ithbāt' (witness for the prosecution) in Arabic is colloquially inserted as meaning a witness testifying to the dream, and not in the legal sense in English or standard Arabic. It is because it is unconsciously used, outside the legal context, to stress the point that something has actually happened, that it is here effective from the linguistic point of view. Structurally, however, the author's personal comment is, I think, superfluous. The traditional image of women is repeated in Sālma,⁽²⁾ a story from the **Al-Nās wa al-Dunyā** collection. To begin with, al-Hāshimī indulges in a lengthy introduction and then, as with the remainder of this collection, the story lacks a plot in the true sense. Sālma

1. Ibid, p.254.

2. Ibid, pp.49 ff.

is a young girl whose mother has died, her elder brother, Husayn having taken over the running of the family. The brother stops her from going to school, tears up her books and makes her wear the traditional 'Ridā' garment customarily worn by women around the house, based as they are upon coercive authority. Al-Hāshimī gives no explanation of the brother's actions here. The traditional father is a passive man who allowed his son to assume the role of head of the family as soon as he was old enough, while he, the father, withdrew into the background. Another feature that lacks explanation is the fact that there are many old women gathered together in the house, there being many families living in different rooms under the one roof. There is the old woman, Fāṭima, fat and flabby, winking at one of the other women. Khayriyya, the second woman, is laughing while shooting meaningful glances and whispering to her neighbour, her eyes following Sālma. ʿĀisha, another old woman, turns her head as if to suggest something in particular. And so it went on.⁽¹⁾

1. Ibid, p.52.

Sālma observes what is going on but no reason is given to us for the old womens' behaviour. All we know is that they lead very monotonous lives. The story does not pinpoint a sequence of organic necessity - the characters are presented to the reader in one fell swoop as caricatures without any attempt being made to give a total picture of the heroine. It would seem that Sālma has been in love for some time and when the brother finds out he prevents her from continuing her studies. For lack of nothing better to do, the old woman spend their time treating the girl with scorn and derision. The following extract reflects this situation and emphasizes the gulf that exists between the young and old generations:

فماذا يريدون ؟ في حلقتهم وتها مسهم وإشاراتهم ؟
وألقى بنفسها على فراش في ركن الحجرة وضباب من الكراهية
والمقت كانت ترى من خلاله صورة فاطمة المرأة
المترهلة الجسد وإشارات الغامضة وخيرية وتها مسها
المكتوم مع جارتها .. والعجوز في هممتها وتلميحتها
الواضح كلهم يعمدون إلى تلويث هذا الشيء الجميل .. هذا
الاحساس الذي لا تملك قدرة النطق به في قوة
فتحفظه سرّاً بين جوانحها وتهدهده في خلوتها وتحت جنح
الظلام وتغذيه بخيالها بعيداً عن العيون

Sālma says "'What, then, do they want? What is all this staring, whispering and winking about?' She threw herself onto the bed in the corner of the room and a torrent of hatred, indeed, odium, welled up inside her at the image of the overweight old lady

Fātima with her secret winks, and Khayriyya, with her staring and her indistinct whispering to her neighbours. Then there was the other old lady with all her insinuations. All of these old people trying to pollute this beautiful thing, this feeling which simply could not be expressed in words. She kept it a secret inside her, rocking it gently in her solitude under the cover of darkness, feeding it with her imagination away from people's eyes.⁽¹⁾

We do not discover, therefore, the secret that Sālma keeps to herself. Is it a real emotion or a mere daydream? The story reflects this character who lives in a dream-world but is never able to realise her dreams. The story is full of characters but Sālma comes across as an anonymous being. The author describes the gathering in the house in which several families live, the love, friction and rivalry that exists between them, but for reasons known only to herself, Sālma the protagonist, is very unhappy. The objective correlative is evidently lacking.

In the stories entitled Al-Bāb al-Azraq (The Blue Door),⁽²⁾ Nūr al-ʿAyn (Light of the Eye),⁽³⁾ Al-Ḥubb fī al-Aziqqa al-Dayyiqā (Love in Narrow Alleys)⁽⁴⁾ and Hikā-

1. Ibid, p.53.

2. Bashīr al-Hāshimī, 3 Majmūʿāt, pp.79 ff.

3. Ibid, pp.55 ff.

4. Ibid, pp.107 ff.

yat Hubb (A Story of Love),⁽¹⁾ the writer immerses himself in the lives of working-class people and obviously feels an inner motivation to do so. Rarely is he able to tackle issues outside this narrow orbit. His heroines, whether in their physical constitution or their place in society, are anonymous beings inhabiting the world of alleyways that attend the stories of al-Hāshimī. There are no positives involved if art is a mere transcript of a sordid reality.

Al-Hāshimī's female characters indulge their emotions of love behind closed doors but the way in which the author depicts this has little or nothing to do with the artistic elements that usually go to make up the short story. A picture is drawn of a woman's confused and contradictory place in society, for society imposes total separation between the sexes and fails to look upon woman as a human being in the same way as man. For this reason, al-Hāshimī's stories are incapable of offering a prescriptive approach that would liberate the Libyan woman from the conditions she is made to suffer. My point is that art becomes superfluous if it depicts or transcribes reality as it is. The immediacy of such a transcript means, in fact, that the writer could not overcome the fetishism involved in many

1. Ibid, pp.13 ff.

immediate situations in objective reality. A recent writer explains Lukacs' theory as follows:

The cathartic effect of the work can be explained on the basis of already existing dissatisfactions with the fetishistic viewpoint of immediate experience. For Lukacs . . . the experiential antagonism in daily life between a fetishistic conception of subjectivity and tendencies which push towards generality generates the need for a totalising perspective: a need to which the artistic reflection appropriately responds.⁽¹⁾

It is not enough to depict the appearances or phenomena (as they immediately appear) without the essence. To do so is to make a 'mystique', or a fetish of the emotional experience, of love. In Al-Ḥubb fī al-Aziqqa al-Dayyiqā⁽²⁾ from the collection **Al-Nās wa al-Dunyā**, the writer begins, for example, with a lengthy introduction that describes the echoes of the sea, children's cries and faces stealing furtive glances and then quickly disappearing from sight - a chaotic world. Sha^cbān, the central male figure, works in a barber's shop and is in love with Na^cīma, a young girl he sees through the window of the house opposite. It is his wish to marry her and his mother and sister are quite prepared to visit the girl on his behalf. Sha^cbān is

1. Pauline Johnson, Marxist Aesthetics, London (1984), p.43.

2. Bashīr al-Hāshimī, 3 Majmū^cāt, pp.107 ff.

overjoyed but, artistically, the over-use of narrative and superfluous details tends to distract and bore the reader, the theme of the story being expressed in an ineffectual, repetitive and stereotyped way. One would expect a story from the romantic period to condemn traditional practices but although the social images conveyed by al-Hāshimī are romantic in appearance, yet they play no constructive role in changing people's attitudes to the reality of out-dated customs. It should be realised that to recreate reality accurately requires imagination because it is the latter that allows one to select and emphasize social issues in such a way as to impress them upon people. Imagination is the tool that moulds together the small details in every mature work and which concretizes the events, the desires, the emotions and the ideas, all of them, into a cohesive and well-structured work of art. This in contrast to simply observing and recording reality as it is in a direct way without relating it to the root causes of social backwardness and without including it within an organically-developed context that sheds light on such backwardness. Al-Hāshimī's technique fails to render the artistic traits that emanate from the nature of the situation itself or from the possibilities that exist of developing the situation.

For example, Al-Hubb fī al-Azīqqa al-Dayyīqa is nothing but a straightforward record, without analysis, of what goes on in a working-class district of the city. The women are left alone, confined within the four walls of the house but, unlike in the stories of Yūsuf al-Sharīf, they do not occupy centre-stage in al-Hāshimī's stories. With al-Sharīf one can sense the real dimensions of the problems facing women and we are taken into the inner sanctum of their world despite the somewhat confused manner in which the image is conveyed. Al-Sharīf's women often control their own destiny and take the initiative in seeking a divorce due to the husband's behaviour or to the alienation they feel inside the home. With al-Hāshimī, on the other hand, women are a nonentity, without heart or mind, mere shadows. She looks out as a face peeking from behind a door in Nūr al^cAyn. In this story, the writer provides a direct introduction that fails to rise even to an initial artistic level, resembling nothing more than an essay. Moreover, the story's end is illogical and, from an artistic point of view, unjustified.

The young boy, Maḥmūd, is an adolescent who is so in love with a neighbour's daughter that he loses his appetite. His health deteriorates to the extent that he has to stay in bed. His mother, a traditional soul, seeks the help of an

old woman to prepare a charm with which to cure her son:

ويعبق المكان برائحة "الجاوى" ... وتنحني على
الموقد وتحمله وتمضي به إلى محمود
وسعينين تأثنتين يتطلع محمود إلى أمه
وهي تدور بموقد النار مع همهمة لا يفهم منها
شيئا والدخان المتصاعد يكاد يخنق أنفاسه،
ولسبب ما ابتسم محمود لأمه وهو يتمدد على
فراشه مما أثار أمه وجعلها تفكر في
الحجيرة

The smell of benzoin pervaded the entire place . . . She eagerly picked up the fire-pot and carried it back to Maḥmūd. His eyes lost and forlorn, Maḥmūd stared at his mother who was walking around him with the firepot, her face a picture of concern. He understood nothing of what was going on and the rising smoke almost choked him. For some reason, he smiled at his mother and stretched himself out on the bed. This had an effect on the mother and caused her to leave the room . . . (1)

The portrait of Maḥmūd in this story is almost a replica of Sha^cbān in Al-Ḥubb fī al-Azīqqa al-Ḍayyīqa inasmuch as love plays a role in both their lives. However, in Maḥmūd's case he is so infatuated with the girl that he falls ill and it must be said that al-Hāshimī manages to capture the feelings of the traditional mother who is convinced her son is a victim of the "evil eye". One cannot fail to be impressed with the idea of magic and charms and the mother's

1. Ibid, p.56.

eyes looked at the face and a certain embarrassed confusion was apparent in the way he moved his head and hands. He didn't know how. How had it happened? She was smiling, waving a greeting to him. His body trembled in a strange way and joy flowed through his heart. He, like her, raised his hand and waved. She lingered behind the door and his feelings so overwhelmed him that he was unable to stay where he was but had to return to the street.⁽¹⁾

Al-Hāshimī's stories fail to give a true and honest picture of the frustration and anxiety felt in Libyan society and this is due to the fact that the characters adopt a whimsical approach to the problem of tradition, even as concerns the issue of love. A mere glance from behind a door or a window, or from somewhere above, is enough to signify a change in the lives of these adolescents. Such a whimsical approach denies the writer the opportunity to confront the crisis relating to the status of women in Libyan society, particularly so during the period of the fifties and sixties, a time when Libyan women began to fight against social and traditional systems, when they had their eyes set on proper education, when they wished to live as human beings in their own right, ridding themselves of the veil and fighting ignorance and illiteracy. All they could expect from men was to be kept in isolation and misery. Women were lost between the alienation they felt in the home

1. Ibid, p.57.

and the anxiety they felt in regard to what the future held in store for them. It was a time when feminist organisations were set up to battle against the demands of a traditional society and to liberate the female sex. Between the reality of their situation, their expectations and their ambitions, a real and desperate fight was being waged by women. The critic, Khalīfa Ḥusayn Muṣṭafā has this to say of the period:

It was possible for a man to love dozens of young girls, even elderly women, if he so wished. The heroines in the stories written by Abd al-Qādir Abū Harrūs experienced more freedom, striving to learn and gain more out of life, shrouded, as they were, in the emotions of love. With regard to al-Hāshimī, the imaginary internal struggle that he imposes on his heroines represents neither truth or reality. They are mere superficialities that tend to emphasize the subjective trend in his stories inasmuch as the relationship between these characters and society fails to demonstrate an essential interest on the author's part in making a true evaluation of social phenomena.⁽¹⁾

What this valid judgement, in fact, reminds us of is I.A. Richards' apt remark that the artist often finds himself "at the parting of a multitude of ways."⁽²⁾ The metaphor of the cross-roads from which the writer may take his point of

1. Khalīfa Ḥusayn Muṣṭafā, "Muqaddimāt fī al-Qiṣṣa al-Lībiyya al-Qaṣīra, Majallat al-Thaqāfa al-ʿArabiyya, No.1, 2nd. year (1975), p.56

2. I.A. Richards, Principles of Literary Criticism, p.197.

departure is important because it is closely bound up with the sense of his own age. Indeed, the choice of a wider perspective, as indicated by Khalīfa Ḥusayn Muṣṭafā, reveals the nature of the relationship between this sense of the age and the requirements of true art. Thus, Khalīfa Ḥusayn Muṣṭafā says:

Al-Hāshimī's work can be summed up as representative of a very narrow, confined world that lacks any intellectual spirit. The same events are repeated time and again and he derives his artistic experience from such trivial things as eavesdropping. In his stories, love immediately grows out of a fleeting glance from a young man crossing the road or the face of a girl looking out from behind a door. Thus does love blossom forth and acts like an intoxicant to the adolescent who will drink as much of it as he wishes in order to face up to the terrible ordeal of living.⁽¹⁾

Utter frustration colours the feelings and sentiments expressed in the story entitled Al-Bāb al-Azraq.⁽²⁾ It concerns a group of youths who are never able to realise their dreams of love. In fact, whenever al-Hāshimī conveys an image of love it is always in the context of sexual frustration and inhibition tinged with a wretched and miserable ending, all of it stemming from the absence of women and their total isolation from society. In this

1. Khalīfa Ḥusayn Muṣṭafā, op.cit., Introduction, p.60.

2. Bashīr al-Hāshimī, 3 Majmū'āt, p.79.

particular story, ^CUmrān works with some of his friends in a shop opposite which there is a blue door. It only has to open slightly for them all to crane their necks in order to see the young girl who lives there. Each of them longs for the girl, ^CUmrān most of all. He feels such pain and anguish and keeps his eyes so much glued to the blue door that he becomes an object of ridicule on the part of everybody. ^CUmrān is forever thinking about the material things that he cannot afford and which he would have to possess in order to offer himself as a suitor to the young girl:

تبي حوش ودار النوم .. والمالون ..
والاكل وحتى تلاجة ويمكن سيارة ..

She would like to have a nice apartment with a bedroom and a living room . . . a dining room . . . even a refrigerator and possibly a car?⁽¹⁾

The story finishes at the end of the day when the young men leave the shop. ^CUmrān himself walks away but continues to gaze with expectation at the blue door. It is noticeable that, in al-Hāshimī's stories, the more love is frustrated, the greater the emotional wrench. The characters wallow in misery and pessimism unable to extricate themselves from

1. Ibid, p.81.

their ordeal, unable to resolve their social or material problems; for them, there is no road to salvation. It is clear that ^CUmrān's material situation permits him no opportunity to approach the girl behind the blue door because he simply cannot guarantee her the basic necessities of life. In this, al-Hāshimī is expressing the phenomenon of our present age in which materialism reigns supreme. Although he makes the reader aware of the social problems that young men obviously suffer from, yet he neglects to examine their root causes and fails to take an objective stance in his writings. We, therefore, find ^CUmrān wandering aimlessly in a hazy and confused world.

(C) Comments Upon His Literary Approach

In his introduction to al-Hāshimī's short story collection entitled **Al-Aṣābi^C al-Ṣaghīra**, Kāmil al-Maghūr writes that the approach adopted by al-Hāshimī in regard to the creation of his story's character is not that typically adopted by other artists. It is perhaps a commonplace that artists normally tend to refine the character, to remove the superfluities and shape it into a coherent, integral whole. Al-Hāshimī, by contrast, does not convey such an integral image but draws his character in a simplistic manner that fails to reveal his or her true motives and impulses and it

is this that flaws his characterization. However, despite the fact that al-Maḡhūr makes reference to the artistic defects that mark al-Hāshimī's work, he is still not sufficiently decisive in his objections, making no reference to the fact that the use of undue padding and excessive detailing which is more illustrative than functional always has the effect of diminishing the short story's claim to be a literary work of art. Consequently, Bashīr al-Hāshimī's short stories lack the dramatic element that is so important in reinforcing human experience. One has the strong impression that he writes a story at one sitting, that he sets an idea down on paper as soon as it enters his head; this facet of his work indicates that, with al-Hāshimī, the process of artistic creation is not one of originality and conscious composition requiring considerable patience and application as well as a good deal of experience. His method is characterized by improvization and not by the laborious process of artistic creation described by Eliot.⁽¹⁾ Kāmil al-Maḡhūr refers to the way in which al-Hāshimī draws the characters and events in his stories:

Bashīr al-Hāshimī wanders around the streets, taking note of and drawing on things he sees - 'the experiences of his life' - and then interprets them

1. See T.S. Eliot, Selected Essays, pp.21, 30.

for people in his own particular style. As varied as the stories are, they do not incline towards the unfamiliar and there is no complexity involved in either the manner of narration, the plot or the action.⁽¹⁾

Al-Maghūr probably means that al-Hāshimī does not transcend what in real life are taken to be familiar, matter-of-fact things or relations; he does not reveal the hidden relations which often elude us in the real world. It is for this reason that al-Hāshimī's art is incapable of providing the shock of recognition that is often characteristic of the effect produced by great artists. A precise examination of this point reveals that the improvisational feature of his stories leads to a spontaneous, unconsidered portrayal of the characters, a method that means that there is no distance between the author and the character in his stories; most of the time, al-Hāshimī provides numerous but superfluous, indeed irrelevant, details that are of no value to the story and in no way help to serve the artistic aim. This is, as mentioned above, due to the fact that he approaches his writing in a hasty and unthought-out manner. It is obvious that, once having consigned it to paper, he does not read

1. Al-Maghūr, Introduction, 'Al-Aṣābi^C al-Ṣaghira, in 3 Majmū^Cāt Qaṣaṣiyya, Tripoli (n.d.), pp.197-98.

his created work in order to determine whether he has been successful in conveying what he wanted to say to the reader. The artist, as Eliot says⁽¹⁾, should be able to demonstrate both a creative side and a critical side. In fact, this exercise of the critical faculty is fundamental to the creative process for it enables the artist in question to cast a strict and critical eye over all parts of his or her work and thereby rectify mistakes and reappraise the work as necessary. Moreover, the short story with al-Hāshimī does not represent a profound and agonising experience and lacks any form of cohesive, integrated action. The event or events portrayed fail to have any real impact on the reader because no impersonality in the true sense is achieved. As al-Maghūr has stated, al-Hāshimī's characters are casually selected from among people he has met and known while walking and strolling around the streets of the city. The events and situations he depicts may be embedded in his memory but this is not enough to 'universalize' the experience, or to transmute it beyond what is merely personal or casual. It is obvious in many stories that the writer's close involvement with his environment prevents him

1. T.S. Eliot, op.cit., Selected Essays, p.30.

from adopting a critical stance vis-a-vis the particular experience he is trying to convey. Maḥmūd Nāfi^c rightly says on this point:

There is no action in Bashīr al-Hāshimī's stories, none at all. To portray a particular scene does not in itself create action and al-Hāshimī's treatment of his scenes fails to provide the coherent stages necessary in a story, comprising, as a well-told story should, a proper plot with a beginning, middle and end.⁽¹⁾

Whether one adopts the Aristotelian conception (or any other) of the role action plays in a story, al-Hāshimī makes no effort to master the skills required in perfecting a work of art and, for this reason, his work is marked by an excessive abstraction that conveys reality simply as seen on the surface and does not allow for any examination of the fundamental issues that represent the root cause of that reality. The imaginative element, which the writer should use in order to blend and properly structure the various aspects and dimensions of reality, is missing from his work and his artistic approach therefore tends to be repetitive in form. For example, in the story Khālatī Ruqayya (My Aunt Ruqayya) there is absolutely no action at all. It fails to disclose a clear image of women's position in Libyan society

1. Maḥmūd Nāfi^c, op.cit., "Al-Namūdhaj", Al-Ruwwād, (April 1966)

and no attempt is made by al-Hāshimī to describe family and social customs by means of any proper development of a tangible situation. As to the noxious influence of tradition with which society has to contend, that is almost slurred over by the author. Moreover, al-Hāshimī ignores recognized and established laws of artistic structure within the short story genre. He narrates details about the central female character without her true image becoming clear to us at all. It is a story that concerns a group of old women who spend their time around the table preparing tea and gossiping about people they know. No clue exists as to what the writer intends to convey in his portrayal of these elderly folk who spend their entire lives washing, cooking and raising the children in the shadow of and under the subjugation of man's authority. The following passage, which finds the old women chatting away idly, demonstrates the writer's lack of knowledge of, and clear failure to apply, any artistic rules in his writing. It is a static image of conventional women in the al-Madina al-Qadima (the Old City) in Tripoli:

وليس صعباً أن يتحدث النسوة في مثل هذه الجلسات
فمن الممكن لأي جالسة أن تقدم مفتاح الكلام، وشاعت
عيشة أن تقدم هذا المفتاح .. تحدثت عن آخر عرس
ذهبت إليه وليس غريباً أن تكون رقية قد حضرته
أيضاً، فاندفعتا في عملية قديم مشتركة .. كان عرس
العازة كل حاجة فيه ناقصة .. الناس روجت جعانه ..
العروسة ؟

ولم يترك شيئا .. واختلط الكلام برنين الضحكات ..

Women find it so easy chatting and gossiping whenever they get together like this. Anyone of them could start talking and now it was Aisha who began, telling everyone about the last wedding she had gone to. Ruqayya had most likely gone as well for both of them immediately set about casting aspersions and running down the wedding. It had turned out to be a total failure and nothing was provided for the guests. Everyone went home hungry. And the bride . . . ? The two women went on and on, nothing escaping their tongues and their gossip interspersed with laughter. ⁽¹⁾

This story certainly reveals the writer's poor and very limited conception of the Libyan woman for he completely fails to convey a convincing image to the reader of the female personality. It is evident that al-Hāshimī is extremely interested in portraying aspects of these conventional women's behaviour but the fact is that he is unable to convey, from a perspective of critical and objective realism, the essence that lies behind the surface appearance. If al-Hāshimī had intended to convey the specific dimensions of the social problems engendered by the prevailing forces of tradition, he should have created appropriate action that would have highlighted his message. Ruqayya and the other women in this story, however, fail to embody any current issue or problem in society; theirs is

1. Bashīr al-Hāshimī, Majmūʿāt, p.102.

simply a photographic image of what is seen by the writer, nothing more. This and other stories by this writer demonstrate an artistic weakness and lack the basic components one would expect to find in a work of art. To be blunt, the story is pointless and was obviously written without the author making a proper appraisal or examination of the content or structuring and moulding it in a manner conducive to good art: there is no content to complement the form nor form to complement the content, the entire story failing to focus in on a specific issue or point of view.

The story Hikāyatuka Yā Zaman (Time, This Is Your Story)⁽¹⁾ suffers from the same faults. Al-Hāshimī again fails to give a clear and proper image of the characters for they have no tangible features or disposition, and, in certain cases, he provides an abrupt and economic description of physical features. The point being made in this story is that women who have no men in their lives are made to suffer alienation in society. This is evidenced in the character of the Sheikh, Sulaymān, who watches Fāṭima disapprovingly as she passes by the shop at whose entrance Sulaymān is sitting:

1. Ibid, p.177. ff.

This is how women behave when they have no man around to look after them.⁽¹⁾

هذا حال النساوين اللّي من غير راجل

Al-Hāshimī should have embodied the tragedy suffered by both men and women in Libya in all its dimensions but this he does not do; he fails to objectively analyse the real and essential causes of the tragedy, particularly as it concerns women, and offers no implicit proposals, suggestive or progressive ideas, as to how it may be overcome. For this reason, the derangement of Fāṭima, the protagonist, comes across to the reader as totally alien to the action. Her madness is evidently related, according to both al-Hāshimī and the Sheikh, to the fact that there is no man in her life. It is because the writer does not objectify the experience that we can hardly say that Faṭima's deranged state is objectively sanctioned. This is an aspect of al-Hāshimī's work that can be seen in a number of other stories inasmuch as none of the elements that go to make up the action, if any there be, are simply juxtaposed without sufficient interaction with the characters themselves and they, for their part, tend to comprise such a number as to crowd the story. In other words, there is no cohesive, organic development of the action. At the end of this

1. Ibid, p.179.

story, the central female character is to be seen running down the street while children, their shouts and cries filling the air, follow her and pelt her with stones. The story also reflects the writer's observations of these characters as he has experienced them in his own daily life. Nevertheless, it cannot be denied that there is a total lack of harmony between form and content. It is a superficial story which the reader tends to forget the moment he has put it down. Moreover, it is highly likely that the reader will run out of patience before he reaches the last page due to the absence of any stimulating situation or action. In fact, the story resembles what one might expect to find in newspaper articles or tracts that deal with social issues. None of al-Hāshimī's stories embody social problems in an artistic way, nor do they encompass any specific artistic approach or definite idea. The world that these stories portray is not sufficiently realistic. Anyone who reads them will also come to the conclusion that the writer fails to address himself to the real aspects of craftsmanship and that his artistic experience remains largely undeveloped and immature. The clearest proof of this, in addition to the foregoing, lies in the rapid succession of stories that he published for this surely points to him having given no

serious consideration to, or genuine appraisal of, the works he was setting to paper. As a result, the majority of his short stories tend to be repetitive and can hardly provide any valuable insights into the ossified realities of the man-woman problematic in Libya. On close examination, one finds that a single scene will incorporate more than one event such that no specific point or issue is dealt with. There is no logical or organic link between the different elements of a story and he conveys a surface picture of reality, providing much superfluous detail but ignoring particulars that are so essential to a story such as providing a clear and comprehensive description of the characters themselves. With al-Hāshimī, they are vague images delineated in name only.

In the story entitled Hikāyat Ḥubb (A Story of Love),⁽¹⁾ a young man visits the shop of a man called Sheikh Ḥassan in eager anticipation of seeing a lovely young girl with beautiful black hair. The story expresses the feelings and emotions that take hold of the young man when he sees her looking out from behind a door. The young man lives in a romantic dream-world and pays no attention to the Sheikh who is reading aloud from the 'Grammar' of Al-Faqīh Ibn Mālik.

1. Ibid, pp.13 ff.

When the Sheikh receives no response from the young man whose eyes are glued on the door he becomes very angry and keeps a stern watch on him. The young man, deliriously happy at the polite looks and smiles he has been given by the girl, leaves the shop very much in love with her. This story is indicative of most of the romantic stories written by al-Hāshimī in that it expresses, in a rapid and superficial image, an adolescent and immature love set against an extremely hazy and unclear social background. The ideas and thoughts are crammed together in a shallow treatment devoid of any form of meaningful or in-depth analysis, the emotion of love being presented as an instant and enjoyable experience borne out of the very first look between a young man and a young girl. The story then recounts the feelings of psychological frustration felt by the young man:

فقد التقيت بها حين كان قلبي يتنفس الصعداء بحثاً
عن شيء ضائع .. كنت افكر فيها كأي امنية لقلب يبحث
عن الدفء .. واضطرب أن أؤكد بأن ثمة خيطاً رفيعاً بين
كثير من الحقائق والاماني .. لأن هذه تجسمت حقيقة في حياتي
ولا اجزم بأن ثمة تغييراً قد وقع في حياتي .. كل ما اعرفه
ان ضعفاً خطيراً .. يعز علي ان استثقله .. قد استحوذ على
جزء كبير من تفكيري وقوة من العواطف الجياشة تندلع
في داخلي وتدفع قدمي بلا رحمة الى حركات متواصلة تحمل
معهاملاً جميلاً .. في نظرة .. وحتى ابتسامة .. وربما كلمة ..

I came across her when my heart was sighing
deeply in search of something it had lost. I thought
of her as the hoped-for desire of a heart looking for

warmth. I had to concede that a slender thread existed between many a truth and fervent hope because my hopes had truly taken shape in my life and I could not be absolutely certain that any actual change had taken place. I could think of barely nothing but the overwhelming vision of the girl) that had excited and aroused my emotions to such a degree as to urge my feet irresistibly forward without let-up and carrying a beautiful hope within me that she would glance out, even smile and - perhaps - talk to me.⁽¹⁾

Al-Hāshimī conveys an elaborate image of the young man in this state of euphoria, of the sentiments and emotions that exert a hold on him even when in bed; yet his description is a haphazard one, an unconsidered leap into portraying the emotional charge felt by the young man that provides no objective facts about the love he is experiencing or about the girl at the centre of his attention. The author expatiates upon the delineation of the hero through the association of ideas in which the young man recalls the songs chanted by him in adulation of his beloved. Al-Hāshimī, therefore, adopts this form of adolescent, romantic love as the theme of the story but attempts neither an in-depth analysis of the young man's behaviour and inner impulses nor a description of the young girl. He turns the spotlight on the psychological aspects but only in a superficial way - the characters are viewed

1. Al-Hāshimī, 3 Majmū'āt, p.14.

simplistically and live in a dream-world in which love is represented as an enchanting melody. The young man, it seems, no longer has any interest in this life and its concerns, or in society and its problems, in fact in anything tangible at all except his feelings for the one he loves.

As to the young girl, her portrayal lacks any proper characterisation and the reader knows nothing of her other than the fact that she steals glances from behind the door and is obviously suffering from a state of psychological frustration. Al-Hāshimī makes no use of imaginative dialogue that would help to give definite form to the characterisation and to the problem of the male-female divide in Libyan society and he appears unconcerned with the issues of interaction and give-and-take in society. Similarly, he shows no interest in developing any form of action in the story and it represents nothing more than a naive study of the young man's feelings and emotions. In fact, the feelings are expressed in a disjointed and chaotic manner that serves to demonstrate Al-Hāshimī's failure to develop the young man's romantic sentiments upon a logical and coherent basis. Instead of utilising well-considered and imaginative dialogue that would alleviate the boredom

aroused by incessant narration and to help in the clear and cohesive structuring of ideas, the author resorts to an ineffective simplified form of dialogue, if indeed, dialogue there be. Moreover, Al-Hāshimī's use of language is immature and haphazard as he vacillates between treatment of the subject-matter, depiction of the hero and the various goings-on in the story. At story end, the reader simply has no clear conception of the character of the young man.

The same illogical romantic fantasizing is repeated in Al-Ḥubb fī al-Azīqqa al-Ḍayyīqa (Love in Narrow Alleys)⁽¹⁾ when Sha^cbān, the barber, takes an interest in Na^cīma, his neighbour's daughter, whom he imagines he can see through the window. He conjures up visions of her and dreams about her, even seeing her beside him on the bed when he is asleep:

وشعرها ينسدل على الوسادة وهمساته تتسلل
من أعماقه ولا يلبث أن يرددها بشفثيه .

Her hair is hanging down on to the pillow and he imagines himself talking to her from the very depths of his soul such that he actually finds himself uttering the words from his lips.⁽²⁾

Al-Hāshimī involves so many characters that they simply overload the story, each one with his or her own problems,

1. Ibid, pp.107 ff.

2. Ibid, p.112.

thoughts and manner of behaviour. Moreover, the characters are distinguished by their lack of real dimension; despite the fact that the author tries throughout to fully delineate the character traits and conceptions of the Libyan personality (including the negative aspects), yet his portrayal remains unconvincing from the intellectual, artistic and psychological points of view. Al-Hāshimī's stories of love and romance are not written against a clear socio-historic background that would shed light on the causes of social backwardness and underdevelopment. Maḥmūd Nāfi^C has this to say about the characters chosen by al-Hāshimī in his stories:

It is impossible to reflect reality by adopting characters such as these to represent the real world. One should select characters who would be able to provide a real and integral context for the issues facing modern man.⁽¹⁾

In his three collections of short stories, Bashīr al-Hāshimī shows himself as a writer who lacks the necessary experience and objective evaluation that would redress many of the artistic flaws notwithstanding that, in some of his stories, he expresses his own experience of problems facing working class people who are simply unable to overcome the

1. Maḥmūd Nāfi^C, "Al-Namūdhaj wa al-Qaḍiyya fī al-Nās wa al-Dunyā, Al-Ruwwād, No.4, 2nd. year, (April, 1966)

various social conditions imposed upon them, striving to earn a living and seizing every opportunity to gain a part of the wealth that has accrued to the country as a result of the new economic status provided by the oil industry. His is a superficial portrayal of people he has lived among and with whom he enjoys close emotional ties; he introduces them within the various stories but does not weave a plot around them or portray them within the necessary confines of an artistic framework, all of which would require a careful choice and presentation of character on the writer's part. For example, as we have discovered in Al-Ḥubb fī al-Aziqqa al-Dayyiqā⁽¹⁾ there is not a single scene that serves a definite purpose in the life of the central character or, indeed, of any of the characters. It is simply a fragment of life devoid of any intellectual or philosophical concept that fails even to give a true image of the social atmosphere that adheres to the life of the people represented in the story. This artistic defect, as we have seen, is typical of the work of al-Hāshimī as a whole. It pervades his world, almost inevitably, because of his insufficient awareness of the main artistic points we have

1. Bashīr al-Hāshimī, 3 Majmūʿāt, pp.107.

been considering in this chapter.

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CHAPTER IX

ALĪ MUSTAFĀ AL-MISRĀTĪ

(A) A Biographical Portrait

Alī Muṣṭafā al-Miṣrātī was born in the Libyan town of Misrata on August 18th 1926 and grew up in both Cairo and Alexandria as a member of one of the immigrant families who had settled in Egypt. He attended a school in Būlaq, Cairo, before enrolling in Al-Azhar, graduating from the Faculty of Theology in 1946. He returned to Libya in 1948 during a very critical stage in the country's political history: the first years of its struggle for freedom from British rule. Libya, divided into three administrative regions - Tripoli, Barqa and Fezzān - was to be embroiled in this struggle for independence for nigh on nine years during which it continued to suffer the same political and social degradation that it had done under the Italian occupation.

It was during this period that Libyan citizens who had emigrated from the country returned in droves to serve the nationalist cause and to expound their political and nationalist ideas. Associations and parties were formed, including the General National Congress Party (Ḥizb al-

Mu'tamar al-Watani al-^CĀmm) which al-Miṣrātī joined immediately following his return to Libya. With his Al-Azhar background, he entertained a strong ambition to found a Libyan nationalist movement on a par with those he had seen in Egypt and whose constitutions and objectives he had examined thoroughly. He was also well acquainted with the party struggle going on between the nationalist and political leaders in Egypt, a factor that stimulated al-Miṣrātī's entry into the political fray in Libya.

Many factors helped to establish al-Miṣrātī as one of the leading figures of the General National Congress Party. An eloquent speaker, oratory gained him a widespread reputation⁽¹⁾ due to its significant role in arousing and influencing public opinion and was, in fact, the principle outlet for the expression of nationalist feelings. To al-Miṣrātī public speaking provided the fundamental means by which he could convey his thoughts and ideas to the Libyan people, his speeches often bringing about his detention and imprisonment.⁽²⁾ Also of much concern to the authorities was his inherent ability to arouse and incite people across the entire social spectrum and to serve as a mouthpiece for

1. ^CAbd al-Qādir Abū Harrūs, "Al-Miṣrātī wa Sahāfat Libya fī Niṣf Qarn", Al-Rā'id, January 7, 1961.

2. Najm al-Dīn al-Kīb, ^CAlī al-Miṣrātī al-Bāḥith wa al-Adīb, p.53.

the real desires of the masses.

It is not to be doubted that his involvement in the ongoing party and political struggle played a major part in moulding al-Miṣrātī's personality. His status within the Congress Party had placed him firmly in the centre of the nationalist movement, a position that awarded him ample opportunity not only to mix with and get to know many social groups but to tour the country to witness for himself the way of life of the people that he might gain a clear insight into the reality of living in the Libya of the time. This is a period of his life that is reflected in his short stories and in his choice of characters and it must be said that his oratorical powers were a great influence upon his approach to short-story writing.

Al-Miṣrātī was employed as a teacher for a while but it was in political and nationalist life that his aspirations lay. The press came to play a major role in his life and most researchers are in agreement that journalism was intimately linked to al-Miṣrātī's political struggle. From the outset, he had proposed to apply his writing skills to the field of journalism and it was in this domain that his principal objective, as writer, man of letters and scholar, lay. His advent into the journalistic fold had begun in Egypt where he had written on various literary and political

issues. When the General National Congress Party was established, al-Miṣrātī became the editor of the party organ "Shu^Clat al-Ḥurriyya" (The Torch of Freedom), and many important issues of the day came to be analysed in his rhetorical and modern journalistic style. In this way, he brought to life that spirit of journalism and true rhetoric that had been missing from Libyan culture - his was an address to the masses, given in a language that everyone could understand. This represented a departure as far as the Libyan press was concerned, his contemporaries still well-steeped in traditional techniques. However, the arrival of a politically active era had made the entire country, at the beginning of the fifties, more conscious of political issues than anything else.

In the main, the journalistic activity which accompanied the nationalist explosion of the forties dominated the political and cultural life of the country and this is demonstrated clearly in the influence that the new political wave prevalent in the Egyptian and Libyan press had on al-Miṣrātī. However, the ruling authorities imposed restrictions on political journalism and clamped down on freedom of expression⁽¹⁾ and it is for this reason that al-

1. ^CAlī al-Suknī, Kalām fī al-Adāb, Al-^CAlām, March 14, 1968.14.3.1968.

Miṣrātī turned to literature as an alternative means by which he could voice his political and social ideas. At the same time, journalism embraced many subjects related to literature and the arts and it is this that moved al-Miṣrātī to become deeply interested in the cultural and historical heritage of the country, immersing himself in all kinds of manuscripts, books, journals and documents related to different periods in the history of Libya.⁽¹⁾

His nationalist leanings further encouraged by this activity, al-Miṣrātī entered a race against time to increase the country's cultural standing in the way of literature and ideas, to develop a cultural stock along similar lines to that possessed by other Arab nations. The task of revitalizing the nation's heritage al-Miṣrātī regarded as a patriotic chore and he set to with an individual and tireless effort. Many problems reared their head: locating source material, the loss of much literary output, problems in publishing and distribution. Al-Miṣrātī's efforts did, however, succeed in unearthing a great deal of the country's national heritage that would otherwise have been lost for ever. Among the works edited by al-Miṣrātī are **Nafaḥāt al-**

1. Najm al-Dīn al-Kīb, Al-Miṣrātī al-Bāḥith wa al-Adīb, pp. 92-93.

Nisrīn wa al-Raiḥān Bi Man Kāna Bi Ṭarābulus Min al-A^ḥyān (The Fragrance of Jonquil and Sweet Basil from the Notables of Tripoli" by Aḥmad al-Na'īb, in 1963, and **Jalā' al-Karb ^ḥan Ṭarābulus al-Gharb** (removal of Distress from Tripoli West), a visit to Libya by the Tunisian traveller Muḥammad bin ^ḥUthmān al-Ḥashā'ishī. This was edited in 1965. He also wrote biographies of a number of Libyan and Arab poets and thinkers.

In the field of historical and literary studies, al-Miṣrātī provided us with important works including **Lamaḥāt Adabiyya ^ḥan Ṭarābulus** (Literary Glances About Tripoli), (1956), **Ṣaḥāfa Libya fī Nuṣf Qarn** (Libyan Press in a Half-Century), (1960), **Ibn Ghalbūn Mua'rrikh min Libya** (1966), **^ḥAlaḳāt Bayna Libya wa Turkiya al-Tārīkhiyya wa al-Ijtimā^ḥiyya** (Relations Between Libya and Turkey: Historical and Social), (1967).

Al-Miṣrātī was also interested in studies related to folk art and folklore and began to collect many anecdotes and stories, sad and humorous, concerning Juḥā, the mythical figure representing folly, stupidity and humour. They were published in 1958 in a now famous book entitled **Juḥā fī Libya**, (1958). Al-Miṣrātī also published a collection of valuable proverbs under the title **Al-Mujtama^ḥ al-Lībī min**

khilāl Amthālihi al-Sha^Cbiyya, now available in its second edition of 1972.

In the field of the short story, there were published the collections entitled **Mirsāl** (Searchlight), (1962), **Al-Shirā^C al-Mumazzaq** (The Torn Sail), (1963), **Ḥafna min Ramād** (Handful of Ashes), (1964) and **Al-Shams wa al-Girbāl** (The Sun and the Sieve), (1977).

All of these have been collected in one volume under the title **Khamsūn Qiṣṣa Qaṣīra** (Fifty Short Stories) in 1983. The Egyptian writer Anīs Mansūr commented upon this prodigious output when he said:

There are two ways to understand Libya. One, you go there; two, you meet the very respected journalist and man-of-letters 'Alī Muṣṭafā al-Miṣrātī. You can trust in the fact that he is a walking archive of events, of anecdotes and anything to do with the Libyan people. He is always ready and willing to enter into any fray, any issue and is never without paper and, in case they dry up, a number of pens. What he knows is abundant but what he keeps secret is so much more. He is, in fact, editor of the newspaper, "Al-Sha^Cb", compiling it from beginning to end every week. The front page he writes in a serious, passionate tone while the last, in a jocular and exuberant manner.⁽¹⁾

Anyone who has made a study of Libya during the fifties and sixties knows well that Libyan society at that time was

1. Anīs Maṣṣūr, Contribution published in Al-Kīb, op.cit., Al-Miṣrātī, p.19.

not regulated to a degree that would afford just and harmonious relationships between its members. Individuals had grown up against a background of inherited beliefs and complex social interplay that had been internalised by people under the umbrella of political, economic and social conditions that tended to support and consolidate the bourgeois trend. In turn, this trend played its part in determining the moral and political attitudes within the country. Undoubtedly, a transformation had begun to take place in these conditions but this was accompanied by a change in people's morals and behaviour. Life became more complex as a result of entirely new social contradictions rearing their head: a pronounced tendency towards material greed manifested itself; misery and suffering accompanied by ignorance and lack of education spread throughout society; and class divisions made themselves felt - the poor, whose poverty was on the increase, and the rich, who were growing wealthier at the expense of their poorer cousins.

It is against the background of the facts and ideas mentioned above that al-Miṣrātī's stories are written. Al-Miṣrātī spares no effort to express the spirit of the Libyan personality as represented in its simple working-class people, to outline the traditional concept of the Libyan woman as well as the daily concerns of family life.

Although the issues raised by al-Miṣrātī in his stories are set against the then prevailing social and political currents, yet, at the same time, such issues should have been incorporated within a framework of organic coherence and artistic maturity; one should, however, take into account the fact that the development and growth of literature was still in its infancy in Libya during the period. The nature of the story, in al-Miṣrātī's mind, was, as we shall see later, dominated far more by social concepts and political thinking than by any manner of artistic consideration. The way in which he fragments the literary, artistic and ideational aspects in his stories makes for an impressionistic approach to the issues concerned and he fails to give them the treatment they warrant; this is, moreover, a feature of his non-fictional studies as well. His stories are full of fleeting and passing impressions yet, clearly, they are allied to the social conditions he experienced in Libya upon his return in 1948. It was, in fact, al-Miṣrātī who was responsible for giving a great impetus to this literary genre in Libya, one that had been established by a number of Egyptian pioneers such as Maḥmūd Taymūr, Ṭāhir Lāshīn, Tawfīq al-Ḥakīm and others.⁽¹⁾ When

1. See Sayyid Ḥāmid al-Nassāj, Taṭawwur Fann al-Qiṣṣa al-Qaṣīra fī Miṣr, Dār al-Ma^Cārif, Cairo (1984), pp.202 ff.

he began to write he undoubtedly drew upon the literary and cultural experience he had acquired as a result of his overwhelming and continued interest in what was being published in Egypt. His stories concentrated, however, on the nationalist struggle in Libya and he was deeply committed to the use of literature as a means to express ideas and concepts relevant to the needs of the time, to imbuing his stories with the character and personality of Libya in a bid to foster change and reform in that country.

The collections **Mirsāl**, **Al-Shirā^c al-Mumazzaq**, and **Ḥafna min Ramād**, written consecutively, are representative of his activity in political and nationalistic circles during the period. The artistic form or shape remains static and there is no trace at all of a developing artistic treatment of his stories. To read but one story is to gain an insight into al-Miṣrātī's overall approach to story-writing: giving free rein to his pen, he tends to digress too much, exercising no control over form or structure. The majority of his characters live in shanty-type accomodation and lead hard working-class lives but he uses the technique of direct statement to convey information about them. In doing so, he fails to inject any element of suspense, and it is a serious flaw in his writing that his stories are little more than rapid impressions that attempt to wed literature and

journalism, i.e. from the artistic point of view, they can hardly be described as successful and this is a point we shall take up later.

Some of his stories concern the misery and suffering endured while growing up in today's society, as in Ḥāmil al-Sundūq (The Box Carrier)⁽¹⁾ and Al-Qirsh wa al-Shiqāqa (The Piastre and the Money Box),⁽²⁾ both of which create a true impression of the real world in which working-class children live. As for his portrait of the Libyan woman, it is a far-from-contemporary one, for he views her only in a traditional light, as if al-Miṣrātī is quite incapable of comprehending the full dimensions of the problem of women. This is reflected in some of the erroneous and traditional concepts conveyed by al-Miṣrātī regarding women's place in society and in the fact that, at no time, does he adopt a well-defined stand on the issue. Moreover, he provides no properly developed insight into the reality in which the Libyan woman lives and suffers generally. This may be due to the fact that, as was the case with the Egyptian short story in its early stages (to which al-Miṣrātī was witness)

1. ʿAlī Muṣṭafā al-Miṣrātī, Khamsūn Qiṣṣa Qaṣīra, pp.43 ff., Al-Munsha'a al-ʿĀmma li al-Nashr wa al-Tawzīʿ wa al-ʾIʿlām, Tripoli (1983), pp.381 ff.

2. Ibid, pp.194 ff.

there is a failure to crystalize the whole concept of the problem of women in a clear and determined way. It should be emphasized that among his dominant, typical interests are political preoccupations to which precedence is evidently given over the situation in which Libyan women found themselves. This is evinced by his unequivocal commitment to socio-political issues, as in Mismār li Mūsūlīnī (A Nail For Mussolini)⁽¹⁾ and Aṭwal Shanab (The Longest Moustache)⁽²⁾ and other stories.

Some argue that the collection **Al-Shams wa al-Ghirbāl**, published in 1977, represents a development both in form and content, a viewpoint that seems to rest on a somewhat weak foundation in view of the fact that the stories still lack any comprehension of literary form and formal principles, i.e. al-Miṣrātī is still shackled by the various constraints that inhibit his technique and style, a style that is, in fact, humorous and derisory, scornful and caustic, welding both literary and journalistic devices; moreover, it is impossible to detach al-Miṣrātī from his Azhari background, one that manifests itself clearly in his style, in the way he expresses himself and the fact that, in general, he

1. Ibid, pp.43 ff.

2. Ibid, pp.194 ff.

cannot put aside his sense of oratory - to separate al-Miṣrātī, the orator, from al-Miṣrātī, the writer, is an extremely difficult task. On this point, Najm al-Dīn al-Kīb says:

Al-Miṣrātī's style and approach continued to be a salient and unique feature of his art; it is a style which one can distinguish from among dozens of others written by his peers. It is spontaneous, overflowing, and is characterized by a good sense of humour. Moreover, you feel when you read him that he is conveying an intellectual concept after having prepared the reader's mind through the necessary preludes. For most of the time his method is that of direct statement, a style used by journalists that everyone can understand.⁽¹⁾

This judgement is objectively true. Its main implications are that, as we have seen in the case of other writers, problems of formal elements, language and structure of the short story have, in the main, been in need of greater refinement and development. These implications will be discussed below.

(B) A Traditional Approach to the Literary Portrayal of Women

Al-Miṣrātī had a profounder commitment to the treatment of social and political issues than he had to aesthetic or

1. Najm al-Dīn al-Kīb, ʿAlī al-Miṣrātī, p.72.

artistic considerations. It is for this reason that his stories are unsuccessful from an artistic standpoint. He deals with the experiences of ordinary individuals but lacks imagination in doing so and fails to look deeply into the issues concerned, the stories being more akin to social documents than to works of artistic merit. He therefore approaches the problem of women without considering or examining any of the underlying factors, simply limiting himself to an external description and conveying their experiences to the reader in the form of direct propositions.

It is noticeable that al-Miṣrātī concerns himself not at all with the factors that affect the position of women. His is a traditional portrayal as founded upon inherited values and properties that have been handed down over generations. For example, in the story entitled ʿAfīf Sharīf wa al-Rādyū (ʿAfīf Sharīf and the Radio),⁽¹⁾ the female sex is relegated as usual to the subordinate and arrested role imposed upon it by the traditional father and head of the family. It is a derisory picture of social backwardness, of the hypocrisy that constitutes a major feature of family life in Libya. The father, Hājj ʿAfīf, maintains his three daughters in

1. ʿAlī Muṣṭafā al-Miṣrātī, Khamsūn, pp.127 ff.

total seclusion while the servant-girl represents the one link between the closed and shut-off world of the girls inside the house and the outside world, society as a whole. The sole diversion for the girls is the radio but Hājī Afīf refuses to let them tune into the music and sentimental love songs that are broadcast, quarrelling with them when he returns home to find them listening to such things. In this and other works of al-Miṣrātī, there exist no characters in the accepted sense of the word; it is as if they have no substance, especially when one considers the girls.

The servant-girl exploits her illegal relationship with Hājī Afīf, as we can see in the following passage:

وقوف عفيف شريف مهلاً بالخادمة القادمة، ودار
حديث خافت ناعم، وقدم لها هدية صغيرة من القراط
الرخيص وقطعة "شوكلاته" من النوع الفاخر.
وجلست بجانبه وهو ينظر ناحية الباب في مزيج من
الاضطراب والخوف وعوامل أخرى، وارتعش جسده من جديد ..
ليمت هي المرة الأولى التي يكون فيها اللقاء المختلس بين
عفيف شريف والخادمة .

'Afīf Sharīf stood up and welcomed the servant-girl boisterously. He spoke to her gently in a whisper, offering her a small inexpensive eardrop as a gift together with a piece of expensive chocolate of the magnificent kind and sat down beside her. He was looking at the door with feelings of concern and apprehension, mixed with other factors. somewhat concerned and apprehensive. Again, his body

trembled; this was not the first time Hājj Afīf and the servant-girl had met furtively.⁽¹⁾

It is perhaps no exaggeration to say that the use of such expressions as 'min al-Naw^C al-Fakhīr' (of the magnificent kind) and '^CAwamil Ukhrā' (other factors) is not the happiest choice. They are cliches which belong more to journalese than to the context here being discussed. They can be used in advertisements to attract the attention. Al-Miṣrātī, however, concentrates on the father's feelings towards the servant-girl and reveals the sexual frustration from which he suffers. The writer is attempting a comparison between the fact of their illegal relationship and that of the deprivation experienced by the daughters who are not even allowed to listen to the radio. This typifies the social hypocrisy that marks the character of the patriarchal society of which Hājj Afīf is part, hypocrisy that is highlighted in the dialogue between the father and his daughters when he discusses the question of virtue and morality with them. He gives them a stern lecture, repeatedly emphasizing the points he wishes to make; for example, he tells the girls that the radio is to be used solely for listening to the Qur'an, to Arabic poetry or the

1. Ibid, p.132.

news.

The structure of this story, like others written by al-Miṣrātī, is very fragmented - the narrative is overlong and there is too much padding, demonstrating the inability of the author to fashion the story in a way that is artistically mature rather than as a series of episodic scenes. The last part of the story tells of the father's outburst when he decides to lock the radio away in his own room so his daughters cannot use it. The servant-girls, however, fetches it back for them when the father is out at work. Yet the author fails to express any disapproval of the father's behaviour, conveying the story as simply that - a story. The relationship between Hājj ʿAfīf and the servant-girl as opposed to the severe restrictions he places on his daughters serves to emphasize the total contradiction between the two situations. If this proves anything at all, it is the backwardness and constraint that is suffered by Libyan women. What distinguishes this story is the fact that, unlike the generalities and abstractions that mark other stories by al-Miṣrātī, certain tangible details are given. For instance, he describes the gifts which the father bestows on the servant-girl, her appearance and mannerisms, the names of the singers and the songs that the daughters listen to . . . However, with the exception of

the servant-girl, he fails to concentrate upon any aspect of the female personality and is unable to define it in the reader's mind with any degree of clarity, notwithstanding that al-Miṣrātī does attempt to put his finger on the pulse of the problem - the isolation and virtual imprisonment of women in Libya if they were the standard-bearers of virtue in society. This is despite the fact that such virtue is being violated inside the Hājj's home and within earshot of the girls themselves.

In Al-Mahatta (The Bus Stop),⁽¹⁾ the father Hājj Mitlowī has the same traditional attitude towards women as Hājj ʿAfīf. In this story, the central male character represents the extreme stance of the traditionally-inclined Libyan father towards both the place of women in a society undergoing a stage of transition from an old world to a new, and the education of women itself. As usual, the writer broaches the subject without delving into the essence of the problem. The father is extremely anxious and ill at ease over his schoolgirl daughter who has now reached the age of adolescence. He is forever inspecting her school-books and monitoring her girl friends when they come to call. When, one day, he learns that his daughter wants to dye her hair,

1. ʿAlī Muṣṭafā al-Miṣrātī, Khamsūn, pp.71 ff.

he gets very angry and says:

ما عنديش بنات تصبغ شعر رأسها زي بنات الروامه ،
والوجوه اللي في المجلات ، شعرك أسود ،
لازم يبقى أسود ، طويل لازم يـــــــبقى
طويل .

I will not have daughters who dye their hair like European girls and who want to make up their faces like they see in magazines. Your hair is black and is to stay black. Your hair is long and must stay that way.⁽¹⁾

The writer's use of colloquial Arabic here is effective because it accurately conveys the commanding or domineering tone of the voice. It reinforces the impression of a powerful, external authority which is symbolized by the father and which young women in Libya, when educated, will discover to be an obsolete attitude. A real storm blows up when the father discovers a love story under his daughter's pillow and gives her an irrevocable order to attend school no more. There is increased tension in the house when the Ministry of Communications erects a bus stop in front of the Hājj's house. This is when the main problem begins. The father becomes utterly preoccupied with the bus stop, maintaining a strict and ever-vigilant eye on it. Because of his daughter, he closes all the doors and windows

1. Ibid, p.72.

and gets very upset indeed when he notices a young man always standing at the bus stop; he does not feel happy about this fellow at all and is convinced he wants to molest his daughter. A strong argument ensues between them. All of this is highly entertaining to the reader because the youth has never met the girl in his life but simply wants to get to work. In desperation, the father writes to the Ministry of Communications, to his representative in Parliament and finally to the Minister himself. Unfortunately, the author conveys all this by means of direct statement, tedious narrative and general observations about virtue and morality.

The Ministry is, of course, controlled by a strict bureaucracy. The Minister himself writes to the father and tells him the problem as he sees it lies not with the Ministry of Communications but with the bus company. The Hājī then sends telegrammes to the ministers, to Parliament, to the local municipality, to the Religious Assembly and to the local newspapers, all voicing his complaints - and all to no avail. What al-Miṣrātī is doing is to underscore the fathers adherence to the old traditional ways of family life and his desire to shield his daughter from what he considers to be the bad influences resulting from social change in the modern world.

There is another humorous situation - that of the encounter between the Hājj and the Italian engineer in the bus company wherein both men view the problem of women against the backdrop of their own particular cultures. The Italian is very liberal-minded and allows his daughter to take on various jobs such as are to be found in the cinema or the dance hall. The Hājj is simply unable to accept the European culture which allows this form of behaviour.

The social backdrop to the story is the invasion of city life by the modern world resulting in, among other things, an exodus from the countryside. In this respect, another problem looms up for the Hājj when he decides to let out two of his rooms as a shop. He finally refuses to do so because the only people interested in renting them have the kind of business that would mean a great many customers coming and going, or else it is people who wish to open a form of sports club and that might attract a lot of young people who would attempt to molest his daughter. Then, all of a sudden, the story ends when the reader learns that the youth who had been standing at the bus stop is going to wed the Hājj's daughter.

The father's traditional attitude towards the question of female education is also dealt with by al-Miṣrātī:

وهو لا يريد لها معلمة ، ولا موظفة ، ولا شيء من
هذا الكلام الفارغ ، أهي تحفظ بضع سور و آيات
تصلي بها ، وتعرف الفرائض ، وتقرأ شوية
وساد ، يكفي .

He didn't want her to be a teacher or civil servant or any rubbish like that. It was enough for her to learn by rote a number of Suras and verses from the Koran for her prayers, to know her religious obligations and to read a little - that was sufficient.⁽¹⁾

In tackling these social problems, al-Miṣrātī offers no examination of the real dimensions of the generation gap, that struggle between the older generation and the new, and fails to underscore the inevitable changes that are taking place in society. Consequently, the story lacks the dramatic form it needs to outline the struggle that is going on between traditionalist forces and modern concepts. For this reason, al-Miṣrātī's examination of the problems succeeds only on a superficial basis. Objectively, the author offers no progressive stance on the issues because al-Miṣrātī's approach is along the same traditional lines as other conservative writers.

When al-Miṣrātī returned from Egypt, the problem of the veil and seclusion of women was a major social phenomenon. His third story Mudarris Li Bint Muḥajjaba (A Teacher for a

1. 'Alī Muṣṭafā al-Miṣrātī, Khamsūn, p.72.

Veiled Girl),⁽¹⁾ he used as a vehicle to demonstrate that the veil in no way serves to maintain the honour and dignity of a woman. It is also a criticism of the older generation of Libyans who are extremely distrustful of female education, believing it to be a corruptive influence on morals or even contrary to the teachings of Islam. The ideas expressed in this story have a personal association with the writer reflecting, as they do, some of his own experiences when he first returned to Libya and sought work as a teacher. In the story, the central male character has become totally disorientated and has no idea of what the future holds in store. He meets a merchant who employs him as an accounts clerk but his interest in becoming a writer finally loses him the position. When al-Misrātī first returned to Libya he worked as a correspondent for an Egyptian newspaper, "Ṣawt al-Umma", (Lisān Ḥāl al-Wafd - Organ of the Wafd).⁽¹⁾ In his despatches to Cairo, he concerned himself with the question of Libyan independence but, unfortunately, was never paid his expenses by the newspaper despite his seeking the help of the editor on more than one occasion. It is these personal experiences of the author that he uses as the background or social environment

1. Ibid, pp.26 ff.

2. Ibid, p.27.

against which the author criticises the status of women in Libya. In the story, the main character, after being dismissed from his job as an accounts clerk, is shown sympathy by a traditionally-inclined sheikh who invites him for supper. He offers him the job of teaching his daughter and this leads the young man to believe that his chance for real work has arrived - on the one hand, he will pursue the task for which he has been trained and, on the other, will meet a nice Libyan girl.

However, his hopes are straightway dashed - the sheikh is a traditional reactionary father and he insists on drawing up an agreement between himself and the young man, an agreement that is so lengthy, containing many appendices and explanatory clauses, that it virtually resembles an international agreement between sovereign states. In all, there are more than 24 conditions and it is this that is indicative of the jocular spirit that sets apart al-Misrātī's works. The most important conditions are that he must never be allowed to see the girl's face and must teach her only to read, not to write. Thus, all his hopes are quashed, especially as, after reading aloud the clauses of the contract, the sheikh warns him that:

أنا اسمي سبع الليل ، أنا غول الصحراء ،
أنا جدى كان قطاع طريق ... أنا "قبضاي" ألا ترى
شواربي يقف عليها المقر ؟

I am called the lion of the night; I am the demon of the desert. My grandfather was a bandit and I am exceedingly tough. Don't you see my moustache, upon which a hawk can stand?⁽¹⁾

When, however, the teacher arrives to give his first lesson it becomes clear that the girl behind the curtain is not the Sheikh's daughter at all but the servant. This is when the truth dawns on the sheikh - his daughter has run away with his neighbour's son. The implication is that the severity and harshness of traditional customs and habits are contrary to human nature and tend to bring about counter-productive results. Before the actual moment when the sheikh realizes that his daughter has fled, he expresses his extreme traditionalist stance to the teacher:

وقال: لا تأت لابورق، ولا قلم، ولا كتاب فيه صور .
يا مدرس، الرسول قال في حديث عن البنات علموهن
القراءة . ولا تعلموهن الكتابة .. قلت أولا لا يمكن تعليم القراءة
من غير كتابة ثم هذا كلام فارغ وحديث مكذوب ...
سمعت في الدرس في الجامع من شيخ عجوز . ان تعليم البنت
الكتابة حرام حرام .. وقلت ...
وبقيت ساعتين وأنا اشرح له وهو مصر على عدم تعليم البنت
الكتابة، وقال أن الكتابة تعلم الخط والمراسلة والجوابات
والسوءات وأشياء أخرى أخرى
غير ومحافظ .

1. 'Alī Muṣṭafā al-Miṣrātī, Khamsūn, p.30.

He said, "There are to be no papers, pens or books that have pictures in them, my dear teacher. In a Ḥadith, the Messenger of God said the following in connection with girls: 'Teach them to read but not to write.'" I said, "It is impossible to teach somebody to read without the use of writing." I added, "This is a false or apocryphal Ḥadith and is nonsense." He said, "I remember hearing it once in a religious sermon in a mosque from a disabled old man who said that teaching girls to write was forbidden and ran counter to the teachings of Islam." For two whole hours, I tried to explain to him how wrong he was but he was insistent that girls should never be taught to write. He said that if a girl learned to write she would communicate with others and indulge in correspondence, in asking certain questions and other things.⁽¹⁾

The predominance of the narrative style and the writer's increasing incursion into the story have a detrimental effect, from the artistic and formal points of view. The story structure is weak and indistinct - al-Miṣrātī provides no psychological analysis of the characters and fails to render the treatment of his theme aesthetically acceptable; views, opinions and beliefs should be treated indirectly - through the development of the situation itself. Al-Miṣrātī fails to do this. He simply relates the problem in the form of a direct proposition and it is this that is largely responsible for rendering the characters artistically ineffective within the story structure. In other words, with al-Miṣrātī, the story is nothing more than the

1. Ibid, p.32.

recounting of events, coupled with a didactic approach, that allows no proper examination of the issues or the characters involved; the story does, however, enjoy an optimistic ending, always the sign of a didactic treatment.

Superstition, the use of charms and other supernatural devices, together with the spread of ignorance, also have a part to play in al-Miṣrātī's stories. In Khaditak ^CAynī (My Eyes Bewitched You),⁽¹⁾ he tackles the relationship between ignorance and illiteracy among Libyan women on the one hand, and family life and social relationships on the other. It is al-Miṣrātī's belief that there exists a clear and direct connection between society's attitude to women and the spread of superstition. The central female character in this story is a wife, living a normal family life, who is suddenly taken ill. She and some of her neighbours believe that a charm or spell has been put upon her. The use of such devices which, by their very nature, have absolutely nothing to do with the real world, customarily stems from envy or jealousy and may be ascribable to the lack of education among women in Libya. The women in this story are convinced that jealousy is a strong force both socially and objectively. They gather around the sick person to

1. ^ʿAlī Muṣṭafā al-Miṣrātī, Khamsūn, pp.731 ff.

ascertain who has a grudge against her and all agree that it must be the pedlar. However, they are quite illogical in their approach to a solution - they will perhaps steal a piece from the pedlar's goods after inviting him into the house. It is this strange behaviour on their part that results in the husband divorcing the wife after he has found out what is going on, the life of the family being utterly shattered due to their ignorance and lack of education.

In his short stories, al-Miṣrātī deals with social attitudes and experiences, some of them in a material way, in which case a mere physical description is perhaps sufficient, while others he treats on an abstract plane and this requires an exceptional ability on the part of the writer in order to convey to the reader an impression of the driving forces, impulses and feelings involved. This al-Miṣrātī fails to do; the chief criticism one can make of short stories written by this author is that, in the main, they give the impression of being little more than tracts or articles that one might find in the form of newspaper articles, rather than being literary works of art in the true sense of the word. Despite the fact that the writer is trying to convey or unearth the most significant aspects and

elements that lay at the root of the experiences he is depicting, his is a very negative outlook that fails to tackle the problem of women in an objective manner or offer any viable solutions. One could argue that this is due to the writer's lack of awareness of the real dimensions inherent in the problem of women in Libya.

In the majority of his stories, the woman's lot is depicted in basically the same way, notwithstanding the wide diversity of subjects dealt with. Whatever the social conditions, the woman is always portrayed as a wretched individual forever having to suffer the problems society can put upon her. When she loses her attractiveness, the man will simply cast her aside and look for someone else; when she has given birth to a number of children, she is the one who has to worry and fret about raising them. In the story entitled Atwal Shanab (The Longest Moustache),⁽¹⁾ for example, we are given a revealing picture of the status of women from this angle. In this story, the woman, who is mother to six children, goes to live with her brother after her divorce. After giving many details about the sordid conditions in which the woman and the brother live, the action develops further when a man appears on the scene asking for the hand of this divorced woman. The suitor soon

1. Ibid, pp.194 ff.

disappears after being told that the wife-to-be already has six children from her previous marriage. All this is narrated by inserting many superfluous details in order to emphasize the sordid life of these characters.

Al-Miṣrātī indulges in considerable strange and irrelevant narration about the brother of the female character, Sulaymān, his reactions to the high cost of living, the luxurious villas of rich people, the songs of the Lebanese singer Fayrūz,⁽¹⁾ the problems of the Cold War and other matters that are not directly relevant to the theme of the story. On this point, the Libyan critic ʿAlī Fahmī Khishaym rightly says:

Al-Miṣrātī talks a lot and inserts detail after detail. The result is that one finds oneself in the midst of innumerable series of ordinary, daily events which never come to an end. This is particularly evident in the case of Aṭwal Shanab . . . One finds oneself reading many details about the life of Sulaymān and his poverty and also about the life of his sister, her children, husband, divorce, engagement and, finally, about the escape of the suitors.⁽²⁾

It is only fair to add that what makes this story significant is the theme itself. The sense of helplessness

1. Ibid, p.205.

2. ʿAlī Fahmī Khishaym, "Hal Ya^Cbur al-Shirā^C al-Mumazzaq Baḥr al-Qiṣṣa al-Kabīr?", Tarābulus al-Gharb, (April 30th, 1964).

of divorced women is unquestionably a far from uncommon feature of Libyan society - a divorced woman, especially when she has children, will feel that her life has come to an end. A major theme that runs through the majority of al-Miṣrātī's stories relating to women is the lack of harmony and understanding between the sexes as a result of various traditional customs and outlooks.

In Khalīfa Abū Rā'sayn wa Ḥikāyat al-Mūs (Khalīfa Abū Rā'sayn and the Story of the Blade)⁽¹⁾ the woman is bought and sold without having any voice in her own future, bought and sold to whoever pays the highest price. Abū Rā'sayn offers to marry the heroine, having sufficient money to pay the dowry or 'price' notwithstanding that he has already been married and divorced numerous times.

Society's view of woman is that she is simply a means to satisfy one's sexual impulses and is not wanted for herself - it is this image that is embodied in some of al-Miṣrātī's stories. In Al-Wusūl ilā Qamar (Reaching Qamar)⁽²⁾ the author conveys the attitude of Libyan society towards the woman, that she is nothing more than a sex symbol. At the

1. 'Alī Muṣṭafā al-Miṣrātī, Khamsūn Qiṣṣa, pp.340 ff.

2. Ibid, pp.109 ff.

same time, the woman herself is suffering a sense of isolation in the society, a feature that must be attributed to the deprivation that is imposed upon her. When the young man in the story turns to superstition and supernatural devices as a means to gain the heart of the girl he loves, it is noticeable that the author expresses such extreme romantic notions by picturing the emotion of love from the boy's side only - the young man frequently goes to Qamar's house in order to gaze at her through the window.

Things become increasingly confused for the youth - it seems that his feelings of love have been stirred up by what he has seen in books and films. Again and again he returns to the house, yet he knows so little about her, not even her name. He becomes saddened and depressed and can think of nothing else but Qamar. For example, when he meets his friends in the coffee-shop they discuss everything that has happened that day but none of it interests him at all, except and only when one of them tells him of an old man who indulges in charms and the like and who may be able to help him win the girl's love. Superstition and bewitchment, then, constitute the background against which this story of a young man's search for love turns. It is clear from this and other stories that al-Miṣrātī is attempting to illustrate the psychological and social effects consequent

upon women's isolation in the society. He does not, however, except rarely, provide the reader with the necessary tangible details that would gain him the understanding the issue warrants.

The problem with al-Miṣrātī is that although one can certainly feel, in his stories, the presence of women within the particular social situation being depicted, yet their role is never a positive one. The author analyses none of the woman's feelings or emotions, nor does he shed any light upon the nature of her suppressed desires. He simply neglects to provide a thorough examination of those concepts and notions that are behind the events being unfurled. Considering the fact that the woman, in certain instances, represents the hub of the story, these are aspects that should certainly have been tackled by the author. All of this notwithstanding that the woman in Libya must needs depend on writers, thinkers and scholars who are considered to be supporters of women and women's issues and who should be encouraging them through the medium of literature, thought and art. However, the aim of many of these writers does not extend to aiding women to rid themselves of the constraints and obstacles that hinder their path to freedom and liberation.

(C) Artistic Weaknesses in The Portrayal of Women

There are certain common features shared by all of al-Miṣrātī's short story writings that help us to understand his viewpoint on society. The majority of the stories deal with the lives of the working-class, people who live in shabby and decrepit surroundings. In this respect, one should mention particularly Al-Kā's al-Akhīra (The Last Cup),⁽¹⁾ Mirsāl (Searchlight),⁽²⁾ Atwal Shanab (The Longest Moustache),⁽³⁾ Bal^cūt wa Ḥabl wa al-Kābūs (Bal^cūt, a Rope and a Nightmare),⁽⁴⁾ Hāmil al-Sundūq (The Box Carrier),⁽⁵⁾ Al-Tis^ca wa Mawqīd al-Qastal (The Nine Children and the Chestnut Pot).⁽⁶⁾ All of these stories are similar in that they picture the wretched lives of poor and deprived people who endure misery in the generally harsh conditions they have to face each and every day. The characters depicted are people who suffer cruelly from oppression and subjugation in society. Al-Miṣrātī no doubt experienced such conditions and was intimately acquainted with this

1. ^cAlī Muṣṭafā al-Miṣrātī, Khamsūn, pp.35 ff.

2. Ibid, pp.43 ff.

3. Ibid, pp.194 ff.

4. Ibid, pp.269 ff.

5. Ibid, pp.381 ff.

6. Ibid, pp.257 ff.

lifestyle, a reasonable enough supposition when one considers the conditions in Libya from the end of the forties on into the fifties.

The country's social, economic and political circumstances as they relate to the ordinary man-in-the-street, seeking a living during a time when deprivation, poverty and social backwardness are a central feature of most people's lives, provides the backdrop to al-Miṣrātī's stories. His characters are similar in many ways, even down to identical names, particularly in the case of those names that are somewhat peculiar or are intended to arouse amusement or laughter, a factor that would render their implications difficult to understand for non-Libyan readers. Nevertheless, the writer's depiction of his characters is weak and unsteady for they seem not to be an integral part of the events and conditions related in the stories. The characters' qualities are not rendered but merely stated as representative of certain people or classes of people in Libyan society. The structure of family life in Libya is given similar interpretation in most of these stories; the impression one gains, despite the great number of families depicted, is that of a largely stereotyped, traditional family conceived in a static, ahistorical sense. In the main, the stories are centred upon the traditional patriarch, a symbol of absolute authority in the home who

bears an excessively protective attitude towards his daughters. Women, too, are presented in their traditional role of wife, enduring the yoke of oppression and knowing nothing of the problems facing the fight for women's liberation in the second half of the 20th century. There is, for example, the woman who, in her later years, loses her former vigour and attractiveness and finds herself deserted by the husband, left to suffer the burdens of running a family all on her own; moreover, due to the utter poverty normally experienced by the family in such situations, women, because they have received no education that would prepare them to face the world alone and gain their own livelihood, become totally reliant upon the male sex.

To read al-Miṣrātī's collections of short stories - **Mirsāl** (1962), **Al-Shirā^c al-Mumazzaq** (1963), **Ḥafna min Ramād** (1963) and, finally, **Al-Shams wa al-Ghirbāl** (1977), all of which were brought together in one anthology entitled **Khamsūn Qiṣṣa Qaṣīra** (Fifty Short Stories) in 1983 - is to have a strong impression of looking in upon a solitary world. The presentation and structure is almost identical in every case and there is no apparent technical or stylistic development, despite the lapse of fifteen years between the publication of the first collection in 1962 and

the last in 1977. Narrative is predominant throughout, a feature that creates monotony for the reader and results in a lack-lustre, repetitive portrayal of the characters. The critic, Aḥmad ʿAṭiyya, has this to say about al-Miṣrātī's stories:

Al-Miṣrātī's style is chiefly that of external physical description, long narrative, repetition and cliches. Nevertheless, his stories are real and true-to-life.⁽¹⁾

However, to attempt to convey realism through the medium of direct statement alone is hardly sufficient to create a serious work of art. True, al-Miṣrātī draws on society's experiences for his stories but it takes great skill, within the framework of realism, to mould this substance into an artistically mature entity. Many writers adopt the realist approach in their writings but none succeed save those who possess the skill and ability to penetrate the very depths of their characters, to reach into their very souls and reveal what lies hidden there. It is simply not enough, in a supposed investigation of social issues and attitudes, for a writer to offer a superficial description of his characters. He must look into the essence of human problems

1. Aḥmad ʿAṭiyya, Fi al-Adab al-Lībī al-Hadīth, Tripoli, p.61.

because it is the inter-relationships, either between the characters themselves and allied to their individual feelings and attitudes towards different issues, or between the characters and the events that take place in society, which provide the fundamental structure of the story genre. Into this there enters the relationship between the story-writing process as a whole and the factors of time and space, both of which help to fashion the subject-matter into story form and to create the proper dimensions within which the story is generally conceived. This is where, artistically, al-Miṣrātī tends to fall down in his short story writing - he believes that all he need do to write a story is to convey a simple storyline through the use of narrative. A genuine writer must arm himself with many tools, tools that will allow him to provide a profound and far-from-superficial treatment of the issues and problems facing us in our daily lives. The short story, whether in relation to its characters or to the general shaping of events and attitudes, must needs be structured in a special way and this al-Miṣrātī does not do because he is overly concerned with making direct (and clearly simplified) statements about people's daily experiences. The celebrated critic, Rashād Rushdī, was concerned with this point:

Some people think that every story should have a beginning, a middle and an end, and that, consequently, it should relate certain events, i.e. it should be a story in the true sense of the word. However, this is not the case. Many stories that are published as such are, in fact, nothing more than articles or tracts. Published in the popular press, they are disguised in the raiment of a story.⁽¹⁾

Contrary to what al-Miṣrātī believes, the story is not a free art form but must be constrained within certain agreed boundaries, artistically sound both in structure and form. Moreover, an artistic approach must be made to the depiction of characters wherein they constitute an integral and convincing element within the story. Such a vision frees the writer from the obstacles that are set up by traditional rhetoric and oratory. A true and honest depiction of a story's characters, a proper understanding of their psychological makeup, requires a degree of effort and skill that is not to be found in al-Miṣrātī. Al-Miṣrātī, for his part, limits himself to long-winded physical descriptions of his characters. The events are denied the application of any artistic treatment and no analysis is made of their psychological or social implications. In addition, artistic form, in this general understanding of the phrase, requires the use of dramatic dialogue together with an illuminating

1. Rashād Rushdī, Fann al-Qiṣṣa al-Qaṣīra, Cairo (1959), p.21.

and moving treatment of the issue at hand in order to interest and arouse the reader. Al-Miṣrātī tackles social problems without attempting to formulate the issues within an artistic framework, an approach that would be dependent upon the evocation of a total effect. As Kāmil al-Hādī Ḥurāb rightly points out:

In the collection "Mirsāl", al-Miṣrātī tried to apply the criteria and rules of the short story as a literary genre. However, the outcome was affected and artificial, the stories losing the essence of good story writing - observation, vitality and strength - because of the ready-made truths of which al-Miṣrātī is guilty. This prevented him from achieving his purpose, that of complying with the very criteria and artistic requirements to which he was so committed.⁽¹⁾

In other words, al-Miṣrātī's stories are nothing more than superficial images of society, a narrated series of events akin to magazine or newspaper articles. As mentioned previously, his stories tackle real experiences, including customs and traditions that have been passed down through the ages, which he has taken from the environment around him. He conveys them in narrative form, adulterating the stories with a journalistic style that bears his own commentary on events and, for the most part, is replete with

1. Kāmil al-Hādī Ḥurāb, "Namādhij Kānat fi al-Zill", Majallat al-Thaqāfa, Damascus, (August, 1982), p.38.

political statement. He overstates generalities but gives no tangible details. Often, he will deviate from the main crux and digress into side issues that have no bearing on the story. In the same way, it must be obvious to the reader that his long preambles and introductory remarks in no way serve the story's objective. In Al-Mahatta, al-Miṣrātī begins with a simple physical description of the Hājī's daughter:

اصبحت الصبية بارزة النهدين ، محمرة الوجنات ،
حلوة التقاطيع تسدل شمرها
الأسود الطول على كتفها ،

The young girl had become full and round of breast, with rosy cheeks and bewitching looks (features), her hair hanging down over her shoulder.⁽¹⁾

This is a delightful description of the girl given by al-Miṣrātī in the first few lines of the story but instead of continuing to maintain the reader's attention, he employs the technique of direct statement and indulges in trivialities that distract from the story. Nothing is added in this way, particularly when he himself encroaches on the story, indulging in personal commentary in much the same way - ironically - as the father intervenes in the life of the

1. Al-Miṣrātī, Hafna min al-Ramād, Tripoli, (1964), p.71.

family!

قد تدخل الوالد في كل كبيرة وصغيرة في
البيت . في الطعام... وفي اللباس وشكل اللباس
وطول الرداء ، وحتى عقصة الشعر .

The father intervened in everything that went on in the house, no matter how trivial: the food, the shape of her dress, the length of her gown, even the way she did her hair.⁽¹⁾

Al-Miṣrātī continues thus, giving an excessively detailed description of the concern and agitation felt by the father who has begun to keep a watchful eye on his daughter, this newly mature young lady, even keeping her in sight when she goes to school. One day, he stumbles across a romantic story hidden under her pillow and immediately prohibits her from attending school. Thus, in this lengthy commentary, the writer provides the reader with all the facts, venturing increasingly into even further detail by explaining that the girl's mother has never attended school or been educated. The girl herself, like her mother, will have to learn the things that befit a woman's role in the traditional family: how to cook, raise children and look after the home. The problem with this story is that the main issue is rather unclear - in fact, this is typical of the majority of

1. Ibid.

stories written by al-Miṣrātī in that he always endeavours to convey not only several topics but more than one idea within a single topic. The other dimensions of this story are quite clear-cut when the Ministry of Communications orders a bus stop to be erected in front of the Hājj's home. The father, suffering from sleepless nights and extremely concerned about his daughter, stops her looking out of the windows or going up on the roof. It is excessive measures such as these that relay the Hājj's great anxiety to the reader. He pesters the relevant authorities asking for the stop to be removed, particularly as he has noticed that a young man is always using it on his way to work. Such trepidation on the part of the father, if it reveals anything at all, demonstrates the real fear the father has that his daughter will be corrupted, his inability to face up to the reality of a changing society, to a new, modern world and his distrust of women's education. However, al-Miṣrātī's approach remains that of oratorical and didactic narrative devoid of any artistic structure.

The manner in which al-Miṣrātī brings the story to a conclusion is pure fabrication - the Hājj marries his daughter off to the self-same youth who had been the cause of all his anxiety. It may be that al-Miṣrātī is purposely drawing a derisive image of Libyan man, or is endeavouring

to lay bare the social reality of women's lives. Nevertheless, no concrete details are given about the girl and instead of the author's description serving to enhance the story, to encourage its development towards a fully integrated piece of work, it is nothing more than a purely physical description; moreover, the story, in the main, is tantamount to the kind of survey on social behaviour that is to be found in many newspaper articles.

A successful short story depends upon homing in and concentrating upon particular issues in order to understand them clearly, something that al-Miṣrātī is obviously incapable of. For this reason, the story in question lacks the most essential ingredient: organic unity in the action and events. The following excerpt reveals the intrusion of more than one idea into the story:

يا عمي الحاج لازم تشجع الرياضة واحنا ولاد شارعك
وكسبنا كل المباريات التي اشتركنا فيها ، وعندنا كأس
الموسم وما عندنا محل نجتمع فيه ، ولنا هام ونصف
نبحثوا عن محل ، رجلينا طاحت ... وانت راجل
تحب الرياضة .

Listen, 'Uncle' Hājj, you have to encourage sport. We live in the same street as you and have won all the competitions we have entered, even the season's cup but we have no place to meet. We have been looking for somewhere for eighteen months and we are tired of walking around. We know you are someone who likes sport.⁽¹⁾

1. Ibid, p.77.

Al-Miṣrātī, instead of allowing the action and the dialogue to take its own course within in the artistic structure of the story, renders organic unity impossible as a result of his defective style and technique. The same flawed approach is to be seen in most all his short story writings and this obviously points to a lack of skill and experience in handling the events that surround the issue at hand. In Al-Maṣāgh (The Jewellery),⁽¹⁾ the story lacks proper focus and there is no organic development between the events; there are too many generalities and superfluous details. The intention of the story is to underscore the mental inanity of the Libyan woman and her interest in material and external matters rather than those of a spiritual or intellectual nature. One day, the central female figure, Sāliḥa, is invited to attend a wedding party. She asks her husband, Mas^cūd, who works as a junior functionary, to give her some money so she can hire a gold necklace to wear so as to dress for the occasion in front of the other women. Disaster - the necklace falls off without her noticing. Turmoil ensues but al-Miṣrātī fails to treat the issue objectively. He gives the reader no opportunity to imagine for himself how the situation is going to be

1. ʿAlī Muṣṭafā al-Miṣrātī, Khamsūn Qiṣṣa Qaṣīra, pp.176 ff.

resolved, an approach that would create and maintain the reader's interest. Instead of this, he broaches various solutions in order to extricate the husband from the dilemma facing him. First of all, he goes to see the carriage-driver who took his wife to the reception, then he seeks legal advice and, finally, approaches friends for help. In the end, he borrows some money on credit that he agrees to pay back in instalments. However, one gets the feeling that the dialogue is artificial, that the images and thoughts, whether conscious or unconscious, have no value. The problem is that al-Miṣrātī conveys a picture of reality by means of direct observation and statement and fails to draw on his imagination in order to fashion and mould the story. Consequently, the thematic content of the story seems not to be founded upon real suffering. The following passage reveals another situation that has been included in the story but which has absolutely no connection with the idea first put forward and is quite superfluous. The father discovers that his son has thrown his ball down the well:

ونزل مسعود بجسمه الغليظ في البئر ذى الفتحة
الضيقة ليخرج الكرة التي لا تستحق قرشا .
لكن في سبيل الاصلاح وانقاذ ما يمكن انقاذه ، يضطر
للنزول الى قاع البئر يلهث ، وهو المصاب بضيق التنفس
يتدلى بعصر ومشقة الى قاع البئر مستعينا بيديه ورجليه ،
وتكاد أقدامه الثقيلة تنزلق على درجات البئر اللزقة
الرطبة .
وما يصل الى وسط البئر الا بعد جهد جهيد ، ويظل يتحاور
مع الكرة بمخاطاف حديدى يصيب رأسها فتتزللق وتهرب ، ثم

يُصِيبُهَا مَرَّةً أُخْرَى فَيُغْطِسُ وَتَطْفُو وَتَدَاوِرُهُ
وَتَعَاكُسُهُ _____ اَعْتَيْنِ

حتى يكاد يختنق .

Mas^cūd forced his fat, uncouth body into the well's narrow opening in a bid to extricate the ball which was hardly worth a pittance. Nevertheless, one had to save what one could, so he pushed himself down into the well, panting heavily. He was having trouble breathing properly as he lowered himself with great difficulty, using his hands and feet to steady himself. His hefty feet slithered down the well rungs which were damp and slippery and it was only through tremendous effort that he managed to reach the middle of the shaft. He stayed there still trying to catch the ball by means of an iron hook, trying to grab it and bring it to the surface; he was, at times, able to hit it, but soon it would move away, then appear within reach, moving up and down. For two hours, he attempted to grasp it, while it teased and eluded him until he almost choked to death.⁽¹⁾

The very unfamiliar use of 'yataḥāwar ma^ca al-kūra' or 'tu^cakisuhu' (which means 'to tease him'), which appears in a context supposedly in literary Arabic, reveals that al-Miṣrātī is not conscious of his technique where he ought to be very conscious indeed. However, the situation depicted is but one of many examples of secondary incidents that add nothing to the main issue raised in the story. There are just too many superfluous events and situations for the story to bear and this results in a fragmentation that creates a wide breach between artistic form and content. This lack of organic unity between form and content is

1. Al-Miṣrātī, Khamsūn Qiṣṣa Qaṣīra, p.177.

remarked upon by the celebrated Egyptian critic, Rashād Rushdī:

A short story, by its nature, tells of an event but it is impossible for every event or series of events to be regarded as a short story. Any incident or event can be related in story form but this necessitates the inclusion of certain particular features, the first being that of evoking a total effect on the reader.⁽¹⁾

It is this failure to evoke a total effect through the organic structure that is the main defect of this and many other stories by al-Miṣrātī. The characters use dialogue that tends to be very literal and repetitive as though directly transcribed from what is said in real life; this method is technically inadequate and creates boredom in the reader who becomes over-familiar with the recurrent dialogue. The following is an example of a very weakly-constructed dialogue between the husband and the wife on the matter of the lost necklace:

قال مسعود : يا ملعونه ، كيف طـاح منك ؟
قالت - يظهر كان خيطه رقيق وبايد وانقطم .
كيف ما حسيتيش بيـه ؟
أنى كنت فى الفراشية متلحفة ، متحشمة من الكرارسي
والدنيا برد .
قال مسعود . بالك راح فى الكروسة ..
تعرفنى أوصاف الكرارسي .. ؟

1. Rashād Rushdī, Fann al-Qiṣṣa al-Qaṣīra, p.15.

Mas^cūd said to her, "You, cursed one, how on earth could you have dropped it?"

"It seems to have been a thin piece of thread that got worn and broke off."

"How is it you did not feel it had dropped?"

"It was cold and I was wrapped up behind the carriage screen, invisible to the driver."

"Do you think you lost it in the coach? Do you know what the coach-driver is like?",⁽¹⁾

Although al-Miṣrātī deals with many issues in his stories, the formal content is always the same. The issues are conveyed in a form that does no more than relate events and experiences that the writer has gleaned from specific times and places. Instead of the technique of direct statement being used to aid an understanding of the issues raised, the writer simply pads out the story with a variety of ideas that fail to shed light on the important issues. This denies him the opportunity of controlling the harmonious development of the form and content from one structural stage to another or from one situation to another, neither adding anything superfluous nor leaving out any essential elements.

1. Al-Miṣrātī, Khamsūn Qiṣṣa Qaṣīra, pp.187-188.

The story Ma^ctūqa illustrates what it is like to live in a poor, working-class area and one can sense the collective agony and suffering borne by the people in the following passage:

وأطفال يقفزون كأن أرجلهم لا تطيق أن تلامس الأرض
وصبايا وعذارى، واشباه عذارى ونسوة، يرقبن في
حياء متورات حركة السير في الطريق من
وراء الألواح التي تهزها رياح الزمن، أو من
خلف الرداء المهلهل والتلاخيف وكــــــــــــــــــــــــــلاب
وقطط ومنزلات .

Children jumping up and down, their feet hardly seeming to touch the ground; young maidens (or who would like to be thought of as maidens) and women watching, with a traditional sense of modesty and shyness from their dilapidated shacks ravaged by time, or simply from inside their old and threadbare clothes, the bustling movement of people coming and going, of dogs, cats and goats.⁽¹⁾

The backdrop for this story is the period of the Italian occupation of Libya and the flaws and shortcomings that at that time began to assail Libyan society: the increase in poor, working-class areas as a result of the bad social and economic conditions prevalent in the country, the division of society into two communities, those who lived in the towns and those who dwelt in the shanties that almost ringed town outskirts. cities. Ma^ctūqa, the main female character

1. Al-Miṣrātī, Hafna min al-Ramād, p.50.

in the story, is a poor woman who lives in a shack. She has been married twice, her second husband having married many times. There is a lengthy introduction by the writer in which he explains the effect of war and Italian colonialism on the country - in fact, one begins to get the impression that colonialism is the central theme of the story! However, it transpires that Ma^Ctūqa has worked as a servant for one of the families in the city but was taken to the police station after being accused of theft. This is where the second character, Abū Shawwāl, a local shopkeeper, appears. He has long been taken with Ma^Ctūqa and had previously asked for hand in marriage only to be rejected. Now he feels his time has come and goes off hurriedly in search of a lawyer to represent her. He again asks her to marry him but again she refuses due to the fact that she despises him. However, society gives her no opportunity to prove she can bear life's burdens on her own. Very soon, rumours spread about the relationship between the merchant and Ma^Ctūqa and she finally agrees to marry him only to stop tongues wagging.

This is a brief resume of a theme that al-Miṣrātī has dealt with in many newspaper articles. As usual, he digresses too much and deviates from the real issue at hand. Although the story arouses feelings of sadness and sympathy

in the reader, al-Miṣrātī fails to analyse his characters, nor does he undertake an objective examination of the issues being tackled in the story. Generalization and direct narrative are chief features of al-Miṣrātī's short stories. For example, his description of Ma^Ctūqa is based upon a number of propositional statements, and not upon indirect rendering:

معتوقة .. ذات السحنة من الجمال الذي أرقه
الألم . وحفر الزمن قصتها في سـجله .
قد ابتلعت الحرب أباهـا وكان من المفقودين . ولم
تكتحل عيناهـا برويته . ولم تذكر عنه شيئا ولا تحمل
منه الا الدم في العروق والاسـم في النسب .

Ma^Ctūqa - a vision of beauty suffering pain and torment. Time had written her life in its record-book. War had devoured her father who had been one of the missing. Her eyes did not enjoy seeing him and she remembered nothing about him, taking nothing save for the blood in his veins and his name indicating the line of descent.⁽¹⁾

Through the use of narrative, we learn of Ma^Ctūqa's suffering at the hands of man, a commentary on the attitude of Libyan men towards women whom they look upon as no more than sex objects and as a means of procreation. When a woman loses her attractiveness, the man will look for another wife or simply leave her and disappear:

وتضم معتوقة صغيرها وتهتف في أعماق نفسها
متى يكبران حتى يكونا لها عكازين في طريق الحياة الملتوى

1. Ibid, p.54.

لقد أوقعها حظها في رجل مزواج مطلق ولم تعد
تسعد بالزواج مرتين .
وفي الأولى .. والثانية كان الرجل من النوع الذي يرى
المرأة مرتعا ونتاجا . فليأكل ويلتذ ويرمي بالنواة متى
شَاء .
سيجد المرأة مادام يشعر بدفة الحياة في عروقه
... ..
واختفى الزوج في ليلة غير مقمرة .. وقالوا انه يخدم
في الصحراء ..
وقالوا انه في احدى المقاطعات . ولكن لم يعثروا له على
ظل وانقطعت أخباره .

Embracing her two young children, Ma^ctūqa rejoices deep within. When they grow up, they will be her crutch on the long, tortuous road of life. Fate had put her in the hands of a much-married man who had also divorced many wives and she was unhappy at having married twice. Both times, her husband had been the kind of man who looks upon a woman solely as a breeding-ground, as a means of procreation. He eats of the fruit, savours it, and then throws away the pip when he wants. He will find a woman as long as he feels the warmth of life constantly within his veins. Her husband had disappeared one unmoonlit night. They said he went to work in the desert; they also said he had gone to one of the regions, but no-one ever came across him. Finally all news of him stopped (and she was left with her two young children).⁽¹⁾

From this we can see that al-Miṣrātī's treatment of women lacks an in-depth examination of the dimensions of female experience, something that results from over-indulging in a diversity of events that have no organic connection. The rapid transition from one idea to the next is, therefore,

1. Ibid, p.56.

very apparent:

وكانت لها نفقة انتزعتها من ابي طفلها
عن طريق المحكمة والقاضي .

She had some money that she had wrung out of the father of her children in court.⁽¹⁾

Due to the weakness of his artistic approach, al-Miṣrātī has exposed himself to negative criticism on the part of not a few critics, including Khalīfa Ḥusayn Muṣṭafā:

As a general observation, it is well-known that al-Miṣrātī indulges in wasteful and lengthy introductions and a strange tendency to over-digress. He is, at times, distracted to the point where he almost forgets the issue in question, the character and particular event he is writing about. All this he leaves behind and turns instead to peripheral details that hold no interest for the reader and add nothing to the story. He resorts to side issues and generalizations that make the story unjustifiably lengthy and turn it into something akin to a newspaper article that is not subject to any artistic rules or considerations.⁽¹⁾

This critique is justified and throws much light on the approach we have been adopting in our discussion of al-Miṣrātī's work. That he does not pay a great deal of attention to the structural aspects of the short story has been evident almost from the beginning of his literary

1. Khalīfa Ḥusayn Muṣṭafā, Zaman al-Qiṣṣa, Tripoli (1984), p.80.

career. What is seriously lacking is tact in the broad sense - the ability to take into account the possible effect of the experience upon the reader. The possibility of evoking such an effect is hardly compatible with al-Miṣrātī's insertion of many personal comments and unnecessary generalizations.

* * *

CONCLUSION

Scholars who are primarily interested in the Libyan short story as a literary genre and who do not give precedence to ideological problems over artistic considerations will find that the account here given of the Libyan short story, despite its negative elements, is acceptable but not necessarily pessimistic. These negative elements as regards both the formal structure of the short story and the intellectual content embodied, and ideological attitudes expressed, have emerged as a result of the fact that conventional attitudes, which can hardly be described as forward looking towards women, have been, in the majority of cases, assumed either consciously or unconsciously against a background of theories of art which have not sufficiently developed in Libya. Then there is the fact that Libyan short stories of good literary merit (pre-eminently in Chapter I) have been found to be lacking a true perspective in so far as the liberation of women is concerned. A clear distinction has thus been made between artistic considerations and ideological problems (i.e. the degree to which the Libyan short story writer is aware of, or committed to, the liberation of women, and their portrayal in a new, realistic or progressive manner in the literary

work of art. This distinction between art and ideology has confirmed the conclusion that, despite the growing consciousness in the role of women in Libyan society, this consciousness has, unfortunately, been inadequately reflected in the short story.

If we take into consideration this degree of consciousness in any attempt to discuss the moral and social concerns of the Libyan short story writers here discussed, we shall find that such consciousness cannot, in itself, be a determinant of artistic success. Nonetheless, it has been found necessary to discuss these concerns in order to avoid the pitfall of barren aestheticism; the onus upon us here has been to debate the ideological positions adapted in the literary portrayal of women in the short stories.

It is these positions which have been objectively discussed in the hope that Libyan women, or readers in general, who hold well-defined, unequivocal views about the feminist movement which are different from the beliefs of the writers discussed, can, nonetheless, appreciate and discuss these writers in an objective spirit. In other words, one's ideological or political convictions should not hinder one's appreciation and understanding of the rising generation of Libyan writers. For this reason, the process of appreciation has been possible despite the romantic

position taken towards women as symbols of sex (Chapters II and IV), the lack of interest in the problem of women who are assigned a conventional place in the family structure (Chapters III and IX), the almost unconscious, simplistic account of women in the old city (al-Madina al-Qadima) in Tripoli (Chapter VIII), or the reactionary attitude towards women and their marital infidelity (Chapter VI). Writers who have been promisingly and sympathetically aware of the real problem of female emancipation (Chapters V, VII) have, unfortunately, not been able to reach artistic maturity, presumably because of the lack of any fruitful and serious discussion in literary circles in Libya of literary theory and new literary techniques.

A powerful movement of literary theory is needed in Libya if the Libyan short story is to reach a reasonably high artistic level. My conviction is that it is such a movement that can indirectly disseminate new attitudes favourable to the feminist movement in Libya. For it is only when art becomes truly great that it can effect the required ideological or social change and diffuse truly civilized and valuable attitudes in a country like Libya (where there are, fortunately, no commercial 'best-sellers'). Thus, the short story can become, it is hoped, a persuasive vehicle or

expression for the articulation of the new consciousness in
Libya.

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